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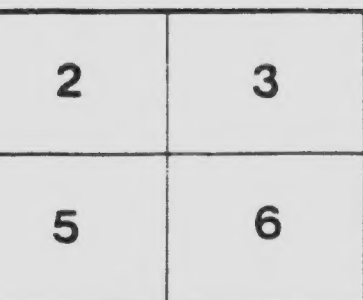
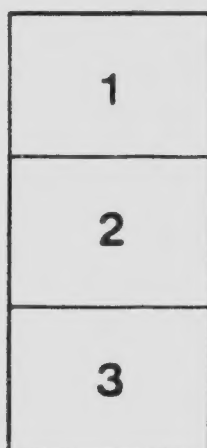
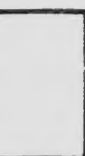
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The World's Classics

CCXIII

NEKRASSOV'S WHO CAN BE
HAPPY AND FREE IN RUSSIA?



Hub. Henning

WHO CAN BE HAPPY AND FREE IN RUSSIA?

BY

NICHOLAS NEKRASSOV

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NICHOLAS ALEKSEIEVITCH NEKRASSOV

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province of Podolia . . . November 22, 1821
Died, St. Petersburg . . . December 27, 1877

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NICHOLAS NEKRASSOV

A SKETCH OF HIS LIFE

WESTERN EUROPE has only lately begun to explore the rich domain of Russian literature, and is not yet acquainted with all even of its greatest figures. Treasures of untold beauty and priceless value, which for many decades have been enlarging and elevating the Russian mind, still await discovery here. Who in England, for instance, has heard the names of Saltykov, Uspensky, or Nekrassov? Yet Sa' kov is the greatest of Russian satirists; Uspensky the greatest story-writer of the lives of the Russian toiling masses; while Nekrassov, "the poet of the people's sorrow," whose muse "of grief and vengeance" has supremely dominated the minds of the Russian educated classes for the last half century, is the sole and rightful heir of his two great predecessors, Pushkin and Lermontov.

Russia is a country still largely mysterious to the denizen of Western Europe, and the Russian peasant, the *moujik*, an impenetrable riddle to him. Of all the great Russian writers not one has contributed more to the interpreta-

tion of the enigmatical soul of the *moujik* than Russia's great poet, Nekrassov, in his life-work the national epic, *Who can be Happy in Russia?*

There are few literate persons in Russia who do not know whole pages of this poem by heart. It will live as long as Russian literature exists; and its artistic value as an instrument for the depiction of Russian nature and the soul of the Russian people can be compared only with that of the great epics of Homer with regard to the legendary life of ancient Greece.

Nekrassov seemed destined to dwell from his birth amid such surroundings as are necessary for the creation of a great national poet.

Nicholas Alexeievitch Nekrassov was the descendant of a noble family, which in former years had been very wealthy, but subsequently had lost the greater part of its estates. His father was an officer in the army, and in the course of his peregrinations from one end of the country to the other in the fulfilment of his military duties he became acquainted with a young Polish girl, the daughter of a wealthy Polish aristocrat. She was seventeen, a type of rare Polish beauty, and the handsome, dashing Russian officer at once fell madly in love with her. The parents of the girl, however, were horrified at the notion of marrying their daughter to a "Muscovite savage," and her father threatened her with his curse if ever again she held communication with her lover. So the matter was secretly arranged

between the two, and during a ball which the young Polish beauty was attending she suddenly disappeared. Outside the house the lover waited with his sledge. They sped away, and were married at the first church they reached.

The bride, with her father's curse upon her, passed straight from her sheltered existence in her luxurious home to all the unsparing rigours of Russian camp-life. Bred in an atmosphere of maternal tenderness and Polish refinement she had now to share the life of her rough, uncultured Russian husband, to content herself with the shallow society of the wives of the camp officers, and soon to be crushed by the knowledge that the man for whom she had sacrificed everything was not even faithful to her.

During their travels, in 1821, Nicholas Nekrassov the future poet was born, and three years later his father left military service and settled in his estate in the Yaroslav Province, on the banks of the great river Volga, and close to the Vladimirsky highway, famous in Russian history as the road along which, for centuries, chained convicts had been driven from European Russia to the mines in Siberia. The old park of the manor, with its seven rippling brooklets and mysterious shadowy linden avenues more than a century old, filled with a dreamy murmur at the slightest stir of the breeze, stretched down to the mighty Volga, along the banks of which, during the long summer days, were heard the piteous, panting songs of the *burlaki*, the barge-

towers, who drag the heavy, loaded barges up and down the river.

The rattling of the convicts' chains as they passed; the songs of the *burlaki*; the pale, sorrowful face of his mother as she walked alone in the linden avenue of the garden, often shedding tears over a letter she read, which was headed by a coronet and written in a fine, delicate hand; the spreading green fields, the broad mighty river, the deep blue skies of Russia,—such were the reminiscences which Nekrassov retained from his earliest childhood. He loved his sad young mother with a childish passion, and in after years he was wont to relate how jealous he had been of that letter¹ she read so often, which always seemed to fill her with a sorrow he could not understand, making her at moments even forget that he was near her.

The sight and knowledge of deep human suffering, framed in the soft voluptuous beauty of nature in central Russia, could not fail to sow the seed of future poetical powers in the soul of an emotional child. His mother, who had been bred on Shakespeare, Milton, and the other great poets and writers of the West,

¹ Many years later, after his mother's death, Nekrassov found this letter among her papers. It was a letter written to her by her own mother after her flight and subsequent marriage. It announced to her her father's curse, and was filled with sad and bitter reproaches: "To whom have you entrusted your fate? For what country have you abandoned Poland, your Motherland? You, whose hand was sought, a priceless gift, by princes, have chosen a savage, ignorant, uncultured. . . . Forgive me, but my heart is bleeding. . . ."

devoted her solitary life to the development of higher intellectual tendencies in her gifted little son. And from an early age he made attempts at verse. His mother has preserved for the world his first little poem, which he presented to her when he was seven years of age, with a little heading, roughly to the following effect :

My darling Mother, look at this,
I did the best I could in it,
Please read it through and tell me if
You think there's any good in it.

The early life of the little Nekrassov was passed amid a series of contrasting pictures. His father, when he had abandoned his military calling and settled upon his estate, became the Chief of the district police. He would take his son Nicholas with him in his trap as he drove from village to village in the fulfilment of his new duties. The continual change of scenery during their frequent journeys along country roads, through forests and valleys, past meadows and rivers, the various types of people they met with, broadened and developed the mind of little Nekrassov, just as the mind of the child Ruskin was formed and expanded during his journeys with his father. But Ruskin's education lacked features with which young Nekrassov on his journeys soon became familiar. While acquiring knowledge of life and accumulating impressions of the beauties of nature, Nekrassov listened, perforce, to the brutal, blustering

speeches addressed by his father to the helpless, trembling peasants, and witnessed the cruel, degrading corporal punishments he inflicted upon them, while his eyes were speedily opened to his father's addiction to drinking, gambling, and debauchery. These experiences would most certainly have demoralised and depraved his childish mind had it not been for the powerful influence the refined and cultured mother had from the first exercised upon her son. The contrast between his parents was so startling that it could not fail to awaken the better side of the child's nature, and to imbue him with pure and healthy notions of the truer and higher ideals of humanity. In his poetical works of later years Nekrassov repeatedly returns to and dwells upon the memory of the sorrowful, sweet image of his mother. The gentle, beautiful lady, with her wealth of golden hair, with an expression of divine tenderness in her blue eyes and of infinite suffering upon her sensitive lips, remained for ever her son's ideal of womanhood. Later on, during years of manhood, in moments of the deepest moral suffering and despondency, it was always of her that he thought, her tenderness and spiritual consolation he recalled and for which he craved.

When Nekrassov was eleven years of age his father one day drove him to the town nearest their estate and placed him in the local grammar-school. Here he remained for six years, gradually, though without distinction, passing upwards from one class to another,

devoting a moderate amount of time to school studies and much energy to the writing of poetry, mostly of a satirical nature, in which his teachers figured with unfortunate conspicuousity.

One day a copy-book containing the most biting of these productions fell into the hands of the headmaster, and young Nekrassov was summarily ejected from the school.

His angry father, deciding in his own mind that the boy was good for nothing, despatched him to St. Petersburg to embark upon a military career. The seventeen-year-old boy arrived in the capital with a copy-book of his poems and a few roubles in his pocket, and with a letter of introduction to an influential general. He was filled with good intentions and fully prepared to obey his father's orders, but before he had taken the final step of entering the nobleman's regiment he met a young student, a former school-mate, who captivated his imagination by glowing descriptions of the marvellous sciences to be studied in the university, and the surpassing interest of student life. The impressionable boy decided to abandon the idea of his military career, and to prepare for his matriculation in the university. He wrote to his father to this effect, and received the stern and laconic reply :

"If you disobey me, not another farthing shall you receive from me."

The youth had made his mind up, however, and entered the university as an unmatriculated student. And that was the beginning

of his long acquaintance with the hardships of poverty.

"For three years," said Nekrassov in after life, "I was hungry all day, and every day. It was not only that I ate bad food and not enough of that, but some days I did not eat at all. I often went to a certain restaurant in the Morskaya, where one is allowed to read the paper without ordering food. You can hold the paper in front of you and nibble at a piece of bread behind it. . . ."

While sunk in this state of poverty, however, Nekrassov got into touch with some of the richest and most aristocratic families in St. Petersburg; for at that time there existed a complete comradeship and equality among the students, whether their budget consisted of a few farthings or unlimited wealth. Thus here again Nekrassov was given the opportunity of studying the contrasts of life.

For several years after his arrival in St. Petersburg the true gifts of the poet were denied expression. The young man was confronted with a terrible uphill fight to conquer the means of bare subsistence. He had no time to devote to the working out of his poems, and it would not have "paid" him. He was obliged to accept any literary job that was offered him, and to execute it with a promptitude necessitated by the requirements of his daily bill of fare. During the first years of his literary career he wrote an amazing number of prose reviews, essays, short stories, novels, comedies and tragedies, alphabets and children's stories, which, put together, would

fill thirty or forty volumes. He also issued a volume of his early poems, but he was so ashamed of them that he would not put his name upon the fly-leaf. Soon, however, his poems, "On the Road" and "My Motherland," attracted the attention of Byelinsky, when the young poet brought some of his work to show the great critic. With tears in his eyes Byelinsky embraced Nekrassov and said to him :

"Do you know that you are a poet, a true poet?"

This decree of Byelinsky brought fame to Nekrassov, for Byelinsky's word was law in Russia then, and his judgement was never known to fail. His approval gave Nekrassov the confidence he lacked, and he began to devote most of his time to poetry.

The epoch in which Nekrassov began his literary career in St. Petersburg, the early forties of last century, was one of a great revival of idealism in Russia. The iron reaction of the then Emperor Nicholas I. made independent political activity an impossibility. But the horrible and degrading conditions of serfdom which existed at that time, and which cast a blight upon the energy and dignity of the Russian nation, nourished feelings of grief and indignation in the noblest minds of the educated classes, and, unable to struggle for their principles in the field of practical politics, they strove towards abstract idealism. They devoted their energies to philosophy, literature, and art. It was then that Tolstoy, Turgenieff, and Dostoyevsky

embarked upon their phenomenal careers in fiction. It was then that the impetuous essayist, Byelinsky, with his fiery and eloquent pen, taught the true meaning and objects of literature. Nekrassov soon joined the circles of literary people dominated by the spirit of Byelinsky, and he too drank at the fountain of idealism and imbibed the gospel of altruistic toil for his country and its people, that gospel of perfect citizenship expounded by Byelinsky, Granovsky, and their friends. It was at this period that his poetry became impregnated with the sadness which, later on, was embodied in the lines :

My verses ! Living witnesses of tears
Shed for the world, and born
In moments of the soul's dire agony,
Unheeded and forlorn,
Like waves that beat against the rocks,
You plead to hearts that scorn.

Nekrassov's material conditions meanwhile began to improve, and he actually developed business capacities, and soon the greatest writers of the time were contributing to the monthly review *Sovremenik* (the Contemporary) which Nekrassov bought in 1847. Turgeniëff, Herzen, Byelinsky, Dostoyevsky gladly sent their works to him, and Nekrassov soon became the intellectual leader of his time. His influence became enormous, but he had to cope with all the rigours of the censorship which had become almost insupportable in Russia, as the effect of the Tsar's fears aroused

by the events of the French Revolution of 1848.

Byelinsky died in that year from consumption in the very presence of the gendarmes who had come to arrest him for some literary offence. Dostoyevsky was seized, condemned to death, and when already on the scaffold, with the rope around his neck, reprieved and sent for life to the Siberian mines. The rigours still increased during the Crimean War, and it was only after the death of Nicholas I., the termination of the war, and the accession of the liberal Tsar, Alexander II., that Nekrassov and Russian literature in general began to breathe more freely. The decade which followed upon 1855 was one of the bright periods of Russian history. Serfdom was abolished and many great reforms were passed. It was then that Nekrassov's activity was at its height. His review *Sovremenik* was a stupendous success, and brought him great fame and wealth. During that year some of his finest poems appeared in it : "The Peasant Children," "Orina, the Mother of a Soldier," "The Gossips," "The Pedlars," "The Railway," and many others.

Nekrassov became the idol of Russia. The literary evenings at which he used to read his poems aloud were besieged by fervent devotees, and the most brilliant orations were addressed to him on all possible occasions. His greatest work, however, the national epic, *Who can be Happy in Russia?* was written towards the latter end of his life, between 1873 and 1877.

Here he suffered from the censor more

cruelly than ever. Long extracts from the poem were altogether forbidden, and only after his death it was allowed, in 1879, to appear in print more or less in its entirety.

When gripped in the throes of his last painful illness, and practically on his deathbed, he would still have found consolation in work, in the dictation of his poems. But even then his sufferings were aggravated by the harassing coercions of the censor. His last great poem was written on his deathbed, and the censor peremptorily forbade its publication. Nekrassov one day greeted his doctor with the following remark :

"Now you see what our profession, literature, means. When I wrote my first lines they were hacked to pieces by the censor's scissors—that was thirty-seven years ago; and now, when I am dying, and have written my last lines, I am again confronted by the scissors."

For many months he lay in appalling suffering. His disease was the outcome, he declared, of the privations he had suffered in his youth. The whole of Russia seemed to be standing at his bedside, watching with anguish his terrible struggle with death. Hundreds of letters and telegrams arrived daily from every corner of the immense empire, and the dying poet, profoundly touched by these tokens of love and sympathy, said to the literary friends who visited him :

"You see ! We wonder all our lives what our readers think of us, whether they love us

and are our friends. We learn in moments like this. . . ."

It was a bright, frosty December day when Nekrassov's coffin was carried to the grave on the shoulders of friends who had loved and admired him. The orations delivered above it were full of passionate emotion called forth by the knowledge that the speakers were expressing not only their own sentiments, but those of a whole nation.

Nekrassov is dead. But all over Russia young and old repeat and love his poetry, so full of tenderness and grief and pity for the Russian people and their endless woe. Quotations from the works of Nekrassov are as abundant and widely known in Russia as those from Shakespeare in England, and no work of his is so familiar and so widely quoted as the national epic, now presented to the English public, *Who can be Happy in Russia?*

DAVID SOSKICE.

PROLOGUE

THE year doesn't matter,
 The land's not importa
 But seven good peasants
 Once met on a high-road.
 From Province "Hard-Battered,"
 From District "Most Wretched,"
 From "Destitute" Parish,
 From neighbouring hamlets—
 "Patched," "Barefoot," and "Shabby,"
 "Bleak," "Burnt-Out," and "Hungry,"
 From "Harvestless" also, 11
 They met and disputed
 Of who can, in Russia,
 Be happy and free?

Luká said, "The pope," ¹
 And Román, "The Pomyéshchick," ²
 Demyán, "The official,"
 "The round-bellied merchant,"
 Said both brothers Goóbin,
 Mitródor and Ívan. 20
 Pakhóm, who'd been
 In profoundest reflect
 Exclaimed, looking low

¹ Priest.

At the earth, " 'Tis his Lordship,
 His most mighty Highness,
 The Tsar's Chief Adviser,"
 And Prov said, " The Tsar."

Like bulls are the peasants :
 Once folly is in them
 You cannot dislodge it
 Although you should beat them
 With stout wooden cudgels :
 They stick to their folly,
 And nothing can move them.
 They raised such a clamour
 That those who were passing
 Thought, " Surely the fellows
 Have found a great treasure
 And share it amongst them ! "

30

They all had set out
 On particular errands :
 The one to the blacksmith's,
 Another in haste
 To fetch Father Prokóffy
 To christen his baby.
 Pakhóm had some honey
 To sell in the market ;
 The two brothers Goóbin
 Were seeking a horse
 Which had strayed from their herd.

40

50

Long since should the peasants
 Have turned their steps homewards,
 But still in a row
 They are hurrying onwards

PROLOGUE

3

As quickly as though
The grey wolf were behind them.
Still further, still faster

They hasten, contending,
Each shouts, nothing hearing,
And time does not wait.

60

In quarrel they mark not
The fiery-red sunset

Which blazes in Heaven
As evening is falling,

And all through the night
They would surely have wandered

If not for the woman,
The pox-pitted "Blank-wits,"

Who met them and cried :

"Heh, God-fearing peasants,
Pray, what is your mission ?

70

What seek ye abroad

In the blackness of midnight ? "

So shrilled the hag, mocking,
And shrieking with laughter
She slashed at her horses
And galloped away.

The peasants are startled,
Stand still, in confusion,

Since long night has fallen,

The numberless stars
Cluster bright in the heavens,
The moon gliding onwards.

80

Black shadows are spread
On the road stretched before

30

40

50

The impetuous walkers,
 Oh, shadows, black shadows,
 Say, who can outrun you,
 Or who can escape you ?
 Yet no one can catch you,
 Entice, or embrace you !

90

Pakhóm, the old fellow,
 Gazed long at the wood,
 At the sky, at the roadway,
 Gazed, silently searching
 His brain for some counsel,
 And then spake in this wise :
 " Well, well, the wood-devil
 Has finely bewitched us !
 We've wandered at least
 Thirty versts from our homes.
 We all are too weary
 To think of returning
 To-night ; we must wait
 Till the sun rise to-morrow."

100

Thus, blaming the devil,
 The peasants make ready
 To sleep by the roadside.
 They light a large fire,
 And collecting some farthings
 Send two of their number
 To buy them some vodka,
 The rest cutting cups
 From the bark of a birch-tree.
 The vodka's provided.
 Black bread, too, besides,
 And they all begin feasting :
 Each munches some bread

110

PROLOGUE

5

And drinks three cups of vodka—
 But then comes the question 120
 Of who can, in Russia,
 Be happy and free ?

Luká cries, " The pope ! "
 And Román, " The Pomyéshchick ! "
 And Prov shouts, " The Tsar ! "
 And Demyán, " The official ! "
 " The round-bellied merchant ! "
 Bawl both brothers Goóbin,
 Mitródor and Ívan.
 Pakhóm shrieks, " His Lordship, 130
 His most mighty Highness,
 The Tsar's Chief Adviser ! "

The obstinate peasants
 Grow more and more heated,
 Cry louder and louder,
 Swear hard at each other ;
 I really believe
 They'll attack one another !
 Look ! now they are fighting !
 Román and Pakhóm close, 140
 Demyán clouts Luká.

While the two brothers Goóbin
 Are drubbing fat Prov,
 And they all shout together.
 Then wakes the clear echo,
 Runs hither and thither,
 Runs calling and mocking
 As if to encourage
 The wrath of the peasants
 The trees of the forest 150
 Throw furious words back :

"The Tsar!" "The Pomyéshchick!"
 "The pope!" "The official!"

Until the whole coppice
 Awakes in confusion;
 The birds and the insect
 The swift-footed beasts
 And the low crawling reptiles
 Are chattering and buzzing
 And stirring all round.

160

The timid grey hare
 Springing out of the bushes
 Speeds startled away;
 The hoarse little jackdaw
 Flies off to the top
 Of a birch-tree, and raises
 A harsh, grating shriek,
 A most horrible clamour.
 A weak little peewit
 Falls headlong in terror
 From out of its nest,

170

And the mother comes flying
 In search of her fledgeling.
 She twitters in anguish.
 Alas! she can't find it.

The crusty old cuckoo
 Awakes and bethinks him
 To call to a neighbour:
 Ten times he commences

And gets out of tune,
 But he won't give it up . . .

180

Call, call, little cuckoo,
 For all the young cornfields
 Will shoot into ear soon.
 And then it will choke you -

PROLOGUE

7

The ripe golden grain,
And your day will be ended !¹

From out the dark forest
Fly seven brown owls,
And on seven tall pine-trees 190

They settle themselves
To enjoy the disturbance.
They laugh—birds of night—
And their huge yellow eyes gleam
Like fourteen wax candles.

The raven—the wise one—
Sits perched on a tree
In the light of the fire,
Praying hard to the devil 200
That one of the wranglers.

At least, should be beaten
To death in the tumult.

A cow with a bell
Which had strayed from its fellows
The evening before,
Upon hearing men's voices
Comes out of the forest
And into the firelight,

And fixing its eyes,
Large and sad, on the peasants, 210
Stands listening in silence

Some time to their raving,

And then begins mooing,
Most heartily moos.

The silly cow moos,
The jackdaw is screeching,
The turbulent peasants

¹ The peasants assert that the cuckoo chokes himself
with young ears of corn.

PROLOGUE

Still shout, and the echo
 Maliciously mocks them—
 The impudent echo
 Who cares but for mocking
 And teasing good people,
 For searing old women
 And innocent children :
 Though no man has seen it
 We've all of us heard it ;
 It lives—without body ;
 It speaks—without tongue.

220

The pretty white owl
 Called the Duchess of Moscow
 Comes plunging about
 In the midst of the peasants,
 Now circling above them,
 Now striking the bushes
 And earth with her body.
 And even the fox, too,
 The cunning old creature,
 With woman's determined
 And deep curiosity,
 Creeps to the firelight
 And stealthily listens ;
 At last, quite bewildered,
 She goes ; she is thinking,
 " The devil himself
 Would be puzzled, I know ! "

230

240

And really the wranglers
 Themselves have forgotten
 The cause of the strife.
 But after awhile
 Having pummelled each other

250

PROLOGUE

9

Sufficiently soundly,

220

They come to their senses :

They drink from a rain-pool

And wash themselves also,

And then they feel sleepy.

And, meanwhile, the peewit,

The poor little fledgeling,

With short hops and flights

Had come fluttering towards them.

Pakhóm took it up

260

In his palm, held it gently

Stretched out to the firelight,

And looked at it, saying,

230

" You are but a mite,

Yet how sharp is your claw ;

If I breathed on you once

You'd be blown to a distance,

And if I should sneeze

You would straightway be wafted

Right into the flames.

270

One flick from my finger

Would kill you entirely.

Yet you are more powerful,

240

More free than the peasant :

Your wings will grow stronger.

And then, little birdie,

You'll fly where it please you.

Come, give us your wings, now.

You frail little creature,

And we will go flying

280

All over the Empire,

To seek and inquire,

To search and discover

The man who in Russia -

Is happy and free."

250

“ No wings would be needful
 If we could be certain
 Of bread every day ;
 For then we could travel
 On foot at our leisure,”
 Said Prov, of a sudden
 Grown weary and sad.

290

“ But not without vodka,
 A bucket each morning,”
 Cried both brothers Goóbin,
 Mitródor and Ívan,
 Who dearly loved vodka.

“ Salt cucumbers, also,
 Each morning a dozen ! ”
 The peasants, merry, jesting.

300

“ Sour qwass,¹ too, a jug
 To refresh us at mid-day ! ”

“ A can of hot tea
 Every night ! ” they say, laughing.

But while they were talking
 The little bird's mother
 Was flying and wheeling
 In circles above them ;

She listened to all,
 And descending just near them
 She chirruped, and making
 A brisk little movement

310

She said to Pakhóm
 In a voice clear and human :
 “ Release my poor child,
 I will pay a great ransom.”

¹ A kind of home-brewed cider.

PROLOGUE

11

" And what is your offer ? "

" A loaf each a day

And a bucket of vodka,

Salt cucumbers also,

Each morning a dozen,

At mid-day sour qwass

And hot tea in the evening."

" And where, little bird."

Asked the two brothers Goóbin.

" And where will you find

Food and drink for all seven ? "

" Yourselfs you will find it,

But I will direct you

To where you will find it."

" Well, speak. We will listen."

" Go straight down the road,

Count the poles until thirty :

Then enter the forest

And walk for a verst.

By then you'll have come

To a smooth little lawn

With two pine-trees upon it.

Beneath these two pine-trees

Lies buried a casket

Which you must discover.

The casket is magic,

And in it there lies

An enchanted white napkin.

Whenever you wish it

This napkin will serve you

With food and with vodka :

You need but say softly.

' O napkin enchanted,

Give food to the peasants !' 350
 At once, at your bidding,
 Through my intercession
 The napkin will serve you.
 And now, free my child."

" But wait. We are poor,
 And we're thinking of making
 A very long journey."

Pakhóm said. " I notice 360
 That you are a bird
 Of remarkable talent.
 So charm our old clothing
 To keep it upon us."

" Our coats, that they fall not
 In tatters," Román said.

" Our laputs,¹ that they too
 May last the whole journey "
 Demyán next demanded.

" Our shirts, that the fleas
 May not breed and annoy us,"
 Luká added lastly. 370

The little bird answered,
 " The magic white napkin
 Will mend, wash, and dry for you.
 Now free my child."

Pakhóm then spread open
 His palm, wide and spacious.

Releasing the fledgeling,
 Which fluttered away

To a hole in a pine-tree.
 The mother who followed it 380
 Added, departing :

¹ *Laput* is peasants' footgear made of bark of saplings.

PROLOGUE

13

350

“ But one thing remember :
Food, summon at pleasure
As much as you fancy,
But vodka, no more
Than a bucket a day.
If once, even twice
You neglect my injunction
Your wish shall be granted ;
The third time, take warning : 390
Misfortune will follow.”

360

The peasants set off
In a file, down the road.
Count the poles until thirty
And enter the forest,
And, silently counting
Each footstep, they measure
A verst as directed.
They find the smooth lawn
With the pine-trees upon it, 400
They dig all together
And soon reach the casket ;
They open it—there lies
The magic white napkin !
They cry in a chorus,
“ O napkin enchanted,
Give food to the peasants ! ”

370

Look, look ! It's unfolding !
Two hands have come floating
From no one sees where ; 410
Place a bucket of vodka,
A large pile of bread
On the magic white napkin,
And dwindle away.

See

g.

" The cucumbers, tea,
And sour qwass—where are they then ? "
At once they appear !

The peasants unloosen
Their waistbelts, and gather
Around the white napkin
To hold a great banquet. 420
In joy, they embrace
One another, and promise
That never again
Will they beat one another
Without sound reflection,
But settle their quarrels
In reason and honour
As God has commanded :
That nought shall persuade them 430
To turn their steps homewards
To kiss wives and children,
To see the old people,
Until they have settled
For once and forever
The subject of discord :
Until they've discovered
The man who, in Russia,
Is happy and free.

They swear to each other
To keep this, their promise, 440
And daybreak beholds them
Embosomed in slumber
As deep and as dreamless
As that of the dead.

420

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE POPE¹

430

THE broad sandy high-road
With borders of birch-trees
Winds sadly and drearly
Into the distance ;
On either hand running
Low hills and young cornfields,
Green pastures, and often
More often than any
Lands sterile and barren.
And near to the rivers
And ponds are the hamlets
And villages standing
The old and the new ones.
The forests and meadows
And rivers of Russia
Are lovely in springtime,
But O you spring cornfield
Your growth thin and scanty
Is painful to see.

¹ Priest

440

" 'Twas not without meaning
That daily the snow fell
Throughout the long winter,"
Said one to another

20

The journeying peasants :—
" The spring has now come
And the snow tells its story :
At first it is silent

'Tis silent in falling,
Lies silently sleeping,
But when it is dying
Its voice is uplifted :

30

The fields are all covered
With loud, rushing waters,
No roads can be traversed
For bringing manure
To the aid of the cornfields ;
The season is late
For the sweet month of May
Is already approaching."

The peasant is saddened
At sight of the dirty

40

And squalid old village ;
But sadder the new ones :
The new huts are pretty,
But they are the token
Of heartbreaking ruin.¹

As morning sets in

They begin to meet people,
But mostly small people :
Their brethren, the peasants,
And soldiers and waggoners,
Workmen and beggars.

50

¹ New huts are built only when the village has been destroyed by fire.

THE POPE

17

The soldiers and beggars
 They pass without speaking,
 Not asking if happy
 Or grievous their lot :
 The soldier, we know,
 Shaves his beard with a gimlet,
 Has nothing but smoke
 In the winter to warm him,—
 What joy can be his ?

60

As evening is falling
 Appears on the high-road
 A pope in his cart.

The peasants uncover
 Their heads, and draw up
 In a line on the roadway,
 Thus barring the passage
 In front of the gelding.

The pope raised his head,
 Looked inquiringly at them.

70

'Fear not, we won't harm you,"
 Luká said in answer.

(Luká was thick-bearded,
 Was heavy and stolid,
 Was obstinate, stupid,
 And talkative too ;

He was like to the windmill
 Which differs in one thing
 Alone from an eagle :

80

No matter how boldly
 It waves its broad pinions
 It rises no higher.)

"We, orthodox peasants,
 From District 'Most Wretched,'
 From Province 'Hard Battered,'

C

From 'Destitute' Parish,
 From neighbouring hamlets,
 'Patched,' 'Barefoot,' and 'Shabby,'
 'Bleak,' 'Burnt-Out,' and 'Hungry,' 90
 From 'Harvestless' also,
 Are striving to settle
 A thing of importance;
 A trouble torments us,
 It draws us away
 From our wives and our children,
 Away from our work,
 Kills our appetites too.
 Pray, give us your promise
 To answer us truly. 100
 Consulting your conscience
 And searching your knowledge,
 Not feigning nor mocking
 The question we put you.
 If not, we will go
 Further on."

"I will promise
 If you will but put me
 A serious question
 To answer it gravely, 110
 With truth and with reason,
 Not feigning nor mocking,
 Amen!"

"We are grateful,
 And this is our story:
 We all had set out
 On particular errands,
 And met in the roadway.
 Then one asked another:

THE POPE

19

Who is he,—the man

120

Free and happy in Russia ?

And I said, 'The pope,'

And Román, 'The Pomyéshchick,'

And Prov said, 'The Tsar,'

And Demyán, 'The official';

'The round-bellied merchant,'

Said both brothers Goóbin,

Mitródor and Ívan :

Pakhóm said, 'His Lordship,

The Tsar's Chief Adviser.'

130

"Like bulls are the peasants ;

Once folly is in them

You cannot dislodge it

Although you should beat them

With stout wooden cudgels,

They stick to their folly

And nothing can move them.

We argued and argued,

While arguing quarrelled,

While quarrelling fought,

Till at last we decided

That never again

Would we turn our steps homeward

To kiss wives and children,

To see the old people,

Until we have found

The reply to our question,

Until we've discovered

For once and forever

The man who, in Russia,

Is happy and free.

Then say, in God's truth,

Is the pope's life a sweet one ?

150

Would you, honoured father,
Proclaim yourself happy ? ”

The pope in his cart
Cast his eyes on the roadway,
Fell thoughtful and answered :

“ Then, Christians, come, hear me :
I will not complain
Of the cross that I carry,
But bear it in silence.
I'll tell you my story,
And you try to follow
As well as you can.”

160

“ Begin.”

“ But first tell me
The gifts you consider
As true earthly welfare ;
Peace, honour, and riches,—
Is that so, my children ? ”

170

They answer, “ It is so.”

“ And now let us see, friends,
What peace does the pope get ?
In truth, then, I ought
To begin from my childhood,
For how does the son
Of the pope gain his learning,
And what is the price
That he pays for the priesthood ?
’Tis best to be silent.¹

180

* * * * *

¹ The lines of asterisks throughout the poem represent passages that were censored in the original.

"Our roadways are poor
 And our parishes large,
 And the sick and the dying,
 The new-born that call us,
 Do not choose their season :
 In harvest and hay-time,
 In dark nights of autumn,
 Through frosts in the winter,
 Through floods in the springtime,
 Go—where they may call you.
 You go without murmur,
 If only the body
 Need suffer alone !

But no,—every moment
 The heart's deepest feelings
 Are strained and tormented.
 Believe me, my children,
 Some things on this earth
 One can never get used to :
 No heart there exists
 That can bear without anguish
 The rattle of death,
 The lament for the lost one,
 The sorrow of orphans,
 Amen ! Now you see, friends,
 The peace that the pope gets."

Not long did the peasants
 Stand thinking. They waited
 To let the pope rest,
 Then enquired with a bow :
 " And what more will you tell us ? "
 " Well, now let us see
 If the pope is much honoured :
 And that, O my friends,

Is a delicate question—

I fear to offend you. . . .

But answer me, Christians,

Whom call you, 'The cursed
Stallion breed?' Can you tell me?"

The peasants stand silent

221

In painful confusion;

The pope, too, is silent.

"Who is it you tremble
To meet in the roadway¹
For fear of misfortune?"

The peasants stand shuffling
Their feet in confusion.

"Of whom do you make
Little scandalous stories?"

230

Of whom do you sing
Rhymes and songs most indecent?

The pope's honoured wife,

And his innocent daughters,

Come, how do you treat them?

At whom do you shout

Ho, ho, ho, in derision

When once you are past him?"

The peasants cast downwards

Their eyes and keep silent,

240

The pope too is silent.

¹ There is a superstition among the Russian peasants that it is an ill omen to meet the "pope" when going upon an errand.

The peasants stand musing ;
 The pope fans his face
 With his hat, high and broad-rimmed,
 And looks at the heavens. . . .

221 The cloudlets in springtime
 Play round the great sun
 Like small grandchildren frisking
 Around a hale grandsire,
 And now, on his right side 250
 A bright little cloud
 Has grown suddenly dismal,
 Begins to shed tears.
 The grey thread is hanging
 In rows to the earth,
 While the red sun is laughing
 And beaming upon it
 Through torn fleecy clouds,
 Like a merry young girl
 Peeping out from the corn. 260
 The cloud has moved nearer,
 The rain begins here,
 And the pope puts his hat on.
 But on the sun's right side
 The joy and the brightness
 Again are established.
 The rain is now ceasing. . . .
 It stops altogether,
 And God's wondrous miracle,
 Long golden sunbeams, 270
 Are streaming from Heaven
 In radiant splendour.

* * * *

" It isn't our own fault :
 It comes from our parents,"

Say, after long silence,
 The two brothers Goóbin.
 The others approve him :
 " It isn't our own fault,
 It comes from our parents."

The pope said, " So be it !
 But pardon me, Christians,
 It is not my meaning
 To censure my neighbours :
 I spoke but desiring
 To tell you the truth.
 You see how the pope
 Is revered by the peasants ;
 The gentry—— "

280

" Pass over them,
 Father—we know them."

290

" Then let us consider
 From whence the pope's riches.
 In times not far distant
 The great Russian Empire
 Was filled with estates
 Of wealthy Pomyé¹ chicks.¹
 They lived and increased,
 And they let us live too.

What weddings were feasted !
 What numbers and numbers
 Of children were born
 In each rich, merry life-time !
 Although they were haughty
 And often oppressive,
 What liberal masters !
 They never deserted

300

¹ Landowners.

THE POPE

25

The parish, they married,
Were baptized within it,
To us they confessed,
And by us they were buried. 310

And if a Pomyéshehick
Should chance for some reason
To live in a city,

He cherished one longing,
To die in his birthplace ;
But did the Lord will it

That he should die suddenly
Far from the village,

An order was found
In his papers, most surely, 320
That he should be buried
At home with his fathers.

Then see—the black car
With the six mourning horses,—

The heirs are conveying
The dead to the graveyard ;

And think—what a lift
For the pope, and what feasting
All over the village !

But now that is ended, 330

Pomyéshehicks are scattered
Like Jews over Russia

And all foreign countries.

They seek not the honour
Of lying with fathers

And mothers together.

How many estates

Have passed into the pockets
Of rich speculators !

O you, bones so pampered 340
Of great Russian gentry,

280

290

300

Where are you not buried,
What far foreign grave-yard
Do you not repose in ?

" Myself from dissenters ¹
(A source of pope's income)
I never take money,
I've never transgressed.

For I never had need to :
Because in my parish
Two-thirds of the people
Are Orthodox churchmen.

But districts there are
Where the whole population
Consists of dissenters
Then how can the pope live ?

" But all in this world
Is subjected to changes :
The laws which in old days
Applied to dissenters

Have now become milder :
And that in itself
Is a check to pope's income.

I've said the Pomyéshchicks
Are gone, and no longer
They seek to return
To the home of their childhood :

And then of their ladies
(Rich, pious old women),

How many have left us
To live near the convents !

¹ Dissenters in Russia are subjected to numerous religious restrictions. Therefore they are obliged to bribe the local orthodox pope, in order that he should not denounce them to the police.

And nobody now
Gives the pope a new cassock
Or church-work embroidered.
He lives on the peasants,
Collects their brass farthings,
Their cakes on the feast-days.
At Easter their eggs.
The peasants are needy
Or they would give freely
Themselves they have nothing ;
And who can take gladly
The peasant's last farthing ?

“ Their lands are so poor,
They are sand, moss, or boggy,
Their cattle half-famished,
Their crops yield but twofold ;
And should Mother Earth
Chance at times to be kinder,
That too is misfortune :

The market is crowded,
They sell for a trifle
To pay off the taxes.
Again comes a bad crop
Then pay for your bread
Three times higher than ever,
And sell all your cattle !

Now, pray to God, Christians,
For this year again

A great misery threatens :
We ought to have sown
For a long time already ;
But look you—the fields
Are all deluged and useless. . .
O God, have Thou pity

And send a round ¹ rainbow
To shine in Thy heavens ! ”

Then taking his hat off
He crossed himself thrice,
And the peasants did likewise.

Our village is poor
And the people are sickly,
The women are sad
And are scantily nourished,
But pious and laborious,
God give them courage !
Like slaves do they toil :
’Tis hard to lay hands
On the fruits of such labour.

“ At times you are sent for
To pray by the dying,
But Death is not really
The awful thing present,
But rather the living
The family losing
Their only support.
You pray by the dead.

Words of comfort you utter,
To calm the bereaved ones ;
And then the old mother
Comes tottering towards you,
And stretching her bony
And toil-blistered hand out ;
You feel your heart sicken,
For there in the palm

¹ There is a Russian superstition that a round rainbow is sent as a sign of coming dry weather.

Lie the precious brass farthings !
Of course it is only

The price of your praying.
You take it, because

It is what you must live on ; 440
Your words of condolence

Are frozen, and blindly,
Like one deep insulted,
You make your way homeward.
Amen.

* * * * *

The pope finished
His speech, and touched lightly
The back of the gelding.

The peasants make way,
And they bow to him deeply. 450

The cart moves on slowly,

Then six of the comrades

As though by agreement

Attack poor Luká

With indignant reproaches.

“ Now, what have you got ? —

You great obstinate blockhead,
You log of the village !

You too must needs argue ;
Pray what did you tell us ? 460

“ The popes live like princes,

The lords of the belfry,

Their palaces rising

As high as the heavens,

Their bells set a-chiming

All over God's world.

“ Three years,” you declared.

“ Did I work as pope's servant.

It wasn't a life—
 'Twas a strawberry, brethren ;
 Pope's kasha ¹ is made
 And served up with fresh butter,
 Pope's steeh ¹ made with fish,
 And pope's pie stuffed to bursting :
 The pope's wife is fat too,
 And white the pope's daughter,
 His horse like a barrel,
 His bees are all swollen
 And booming like church bells.'

470

" Well, there's your pope's life,—
 There's your 'strawberry,' boaster !
 For that you've been shouting
 And making us quarrel,
 You limb of the Devil !
 Pray is it because
 Of your beard like a shovel
 You think you're so clever ?
 If so, let me tell you
 The goat walked in Eden
 With just such another
 Before Father Adam.
 And yet down to our time
 The goat is considered
 The greatest of duffers ! "

480

190

The culprit was silent,
 Afraid of a beating ;
 And he would have got it
 Had not the pope's face,
 Turning sadly upon them,

¹ *Kasha* and *steeh* are two national dishes.

THE VILLAGE FAIR

31

470 Looked over a hedge
At a rise in the road.

500

CHAPTER II

THE VILLAGE FAIR

No wonder the peasants
Dislike a wet spring-tide :
The peasant needs greatly
A spring warm and early.
480 This year, though he howl
Like a wolf, I'm afraid

That the sun will not gladden
The earth with his brightness.

The clouds wander heavily,
Dropping the rain down
Like cows with full udders.

10

The snow has departed,
Yet no blade of grass,
Not a tiny green leaflet,
Is seen in the meadows.

190

The earth has not ventured
To don its new mantle
Of brightest green velvet,
But lies sad and bare

Like a corpse without grave-clothes
Beneath the dull heavens.

20

One pities the peasant ;
Still more, though, his cattle :

For when they have eaten
The scanty reserves

Which remain from the winter,
Their master will drive them

To graze in the meadows,
 And what will they find there
 But bare, inky blackness ?
 Nor settled the weather
 Until it was nearing
 The feast of St. Nichol,
 And then the poor cattle
 Enjoyed the green pastures.

30

The day is a hot one,
 The peasants are strolling
 Along 'neath the birch-trees.
 They say to each other,
 " We passed through one village, 40
 We passed through another,
 And both were quite empty ;
 To-day is a feast-day,
 But where are the people ? "

They reach a large village ;
 The street is deserted
 Except for small children,
 And inside the houses
 Sit only the oldest
 Of all the old women.

50

The wickets are fastened
 Securely with padlocks ;
 The padlock's a loyal
 And vigilant watch-dog ;
 It barks not, it bites not.
 But no one can pass it.

They walk through the village
 And see a clear mirror
 Beset with green framework—
 A pond full of water :

60

THE VILLAGE FAIR

33

30

And over its surface
Are hovering swallows
And all kinds of insects ;
The gnats quick and meagre
Skip over the water
As though on dry land ;
And in the laburnums
Which grow on the banksides
The landrails are squeaking.

40

A raft made of tree-trunks
Floats near, and upon it
The pope's heavy daughter
Is wielding her beetle,
She looks like a hay-stack,
Unsound and dishevelled,
Her skirts gathered round her.
Upon the raft, near her,
A duck and some ducklings
Are sleeping together.

70

50

And hark ! from the water
The neigh of a horse comes ;
The peasants are startled,
They turn all together :
Two heads they see, moving
Along through the water—
The one is a peasant's,
A black head and curly,
In one ear an ear-ring
Which gleams in the sunlight ;
A horse's the other.
To which there is fastened
A rope of some yards length,
Held tight in the teeth

80

90

60

Of the peasant beside it.
 The man swims, the horse swims ;
 The horse neighs, the man neighs ;
 They make a fine uproar !
 The raft with the woman
 And ducklings upon it
 Is tossing and heaving.

100

The horse with the peasant
 Astride has come panting
 From out of the water,
 The man with white body
 And throat black with sunburn ;
 The water is streaming
 From horse and from rider.

" Say, why is your village
 So empty of people ?
 Are all dead and buried ? "

110

" They've gone to Kousminsky ;
 A fair's being held there
 Because it's a saint's day."

" How far is Kousminsky ? "
 " Three versts, I should fancy."
 " We'll go to Kousminsky,"
 The peasants decided,
 And each to himself thought,
 " Perhaps we shall find there
 The happy, the free one."

120

The village Kousminsky
 Is rich and commercial
 And terribly dirty.
 It's built on a hill-side,

And slopes down the valley,
Then climbs again upwards,—
So how could one ask of it
Not to be dirty ? ¹

It boasts of two churches.
The one is "dissenting,"

130

The other "Established."
The house with inscription,
"The School-House," is empty,
In ruins and deserted ;

And near stands the barber's,
A hut with one window,
From which hangs the sign-board
Of "Barber and Bleeder."

A dirty inn also
There is, with its sign-board
Adorned by a picture :

140

A great nosy tea-pot
With plump little tea-cups
Held out by a waiter,
Suggesting a fat goose
Surrounded by goslings.

A row of small shops, too,
There is in the village.

The peasants go straight
To the market-place, find there
A large crowd of people
And goods in profusion.

150

How strange !—notwithstanding
There's no church procession
The men have no hats on.

¹ The mud and water from the high lands on both sides descend and collect in the villages so situated, which are often nearly transformed into swamps during the rainy season.

Are standing bare-headed,
As though in the presence
Of some holy Image :
Look, how they're being swallowed—
The hoods of the peasants.¹

160

The beer-shop and tavern
Are both overflowing ;
All round are erected
Large tents by the roadside
For selling of vodka.

And though in each tent
There are five agile waiters,
All young and most active,
They find it quite hopeless
To try to get change right.

170

Just look how the peasants
Are stretching their hands out,
With hoods, shirts, and waistcoats !

Oh, you, thirst of Russia,
Unquenchable, endless
You are ! But the peasant,
When once he is sated,
Will soon get a new hood
At close of the fair. . . .

The spring sun is playing
On heads hot and drunken,
On boisterous revels,
On bright mixing colours ;
The men wear wide breeches
Of corduroy velvet,
With gaudy striped waistcoats

180

¹ On feast days the peasants often pawn their clothes for drink.

THE VILLAGE FAIR

37

And shirts of all colours ;
 The women wear scarlet ;
 The girls' plaited tresses
 Are decked with bright ribbons ; 190
 They glide about proudly,
 Like swans on the water.
 Some beauties are even
 Attired in the fashion
 Of Petersburg ladies ;
 Their dresses spread stiffly
 On wide hoops around them ;
 But tread on their skirts—
 They will turn and attack you,
 Will gobble like turkeys ! 200

Blame rather the fashion
 Which fastens upon you
 Great fishermen's baskets !

A woman dissenter
 Looks darkly upon them,
 And whispers with malice :
 " A famine, a famine
 Most surely will blight us.
 The young growths are sodden,
 The floods unabated ; 210
 Since women have taken
 To red cotton dresses
 The forests have withered,
 And wheat—but no wonder ! "

" But why, little Mother,
 Are red cotton dresses
 To blame for the trouble ?
 I don't understand you."
 " The cotton is *French*,

And it's reddened in dog's blood ! 220
D'you understand now ? ”

The peasants still linger
Some time in the market,
Then go further upward,
To where on the hill-side
Are piled ploughs and harrows,
With rakes, spades, and hatchets,
And all kinds of iron-ware,
And pliable wood
To make rims for the cart-wheels. 230
And, oh, what a hubbub
Of bargaining, swearing,
Of jesting and laughter !
And who could help laughing ?

A limp little peasant
Is bending and testing
The wood for the wheel-rims.
One piece does not please him ;
He takes up another
And bends it with effort ; 240
It suddenly straightens,
And whack !—strikes his forehead.
The man begins roaring,
Abusing the bully,
The duffer, the block-head.
Another comes driving
A cart full of wood-ware,
As tipsy as can be ;
He turns it all over !
The axle is broken, 250
And, trying to mend it,
He smashes the hatchet.

THE VILLAGE FAIR

39

220 He gazes upon it,
Abusing, reproaching :
“ A villain, a villain,
You are—not a hatchet.
You see, you can’t do me
The least little service.
The whole of your life
You spend bowing before me, 260
And yet you insult me ! ”

230 Our peasants determine
To see the shop windows,
The handkerchiefs, ribbons,
And stuffs of bright colour ;
And near to the boot-shop
Is fresh cause for laughter ;
For here an old peasant
Most eagerly bargains
For small boots of goat-skin 270
To give to his grandchild.
He asks the price five times ;
Again and again
He has turned them all over ;
240 He finds they are faultless.

“ Well, Uncle, pay up now,
Or else be off quickly,”
The seller says sharply.
But wait ! The old fellow
Still gazes, and fondles 280
The tiny boots softly,
And then speaks in this wise :

250 “ My daughter won’t scold me,
Her husband I’ll spit at,
My wife—let her grumble—

I'll spit at my wife too.

It's her that I pity—

My poor little grandchild.

She clung to my neck,

And she said, 'Little Grandfather.

290

Buy me a present.'

Her soft little ringlets

Were tickling my cheek,

And she kissed the old Grand-dad.

You wait, little bare-foot,

Wee spinning-top, wait then,

Some boots I will buy you,

Some boots made of goat-skin."

And then must old Vavil

Begin to boast grandly,

300

To promise a present

To old and to young.

But now his last farthing

Is swallowed in vodka,

And how can he dare

Show his eyes in the village?

"My daughter won't scold me,

Her husband I'll spit at,

My wife—let her grumble—

I'll spit at my wife too.

310

It's her that I pity—

My poor little grandchild."

And then he commences
The story again

Of the poor little grandchild.

He's very dejected.

A crowd listens round him,

Not laughing, but troubled

At sight of his sorrow.

THE VILLAGE FAIR

41

If they could have helped him
With bread or by labour 320

They soon would have done so,
But money is money,

And who has got tenpence
To spare ? Then came forward

Pavlóosha Varénko,
The "gentleman" nicknamed.

(His origin, past life,
Or calling they knew not.

But called him the 'Barin'.) 330

He listened with pleasure

To talk and to jesting ;
His blouse, coat, and top-boots

Were those of a peasant ;

He sang Russian folk-songs,

Liked others to sing them,

And often was met with

At taverns and inns.

He now rescued Vavil,

And bought him the boots 340

To take home to his grandchild.

The old man fled blindly,

But clasping them tightly,

Forgetting to thank him,

Bewildered with joy.

The crowd was as pleased, too.

As if had been given

To each one a rouble.

The peasants next visit

The picture and book stall ; 350

The pedlars are buying

Their stock of small pictures,

And backs for their baskets
To sell on the road.

"Tis general, 'tis in 'em
The merchant

"Well give us some generals;
But back - son - son - son -
New - and - the -
Be laid - for

Your sons -
The merchant
"It is -
"

Yo - val - us,
To pay - rubbish,
at swindling - stor!
at the peasants
ie - no - nother?
he wants
An expert - hi
But true - to - tw
The

370

an office

officials!

look one
as cheap:
A minist - kin

In view of his stomach
As round as a barrel.
And seventeen medals.

380

The merchant is serving
 With greatest politeness
 Displaying and praising,
 With patience unyielding—
 A thief of the first-class

He is, come from Moscow
 Of Blücher he sells them

A hundred small pictures, 390
 As many of Fótýi¹

The archimandrite,
 And of Sipko¹ the brigand;

A book of the sayings
 Of droll Balakir
 The "English sword," too.

The books were put into
 The packs of the pedlars;

The pictures will travel
 All over great Russia, 400

Until they find rest
 On the wall of some peasant—
 The devil knows why!

May it come quickly
 The time when the peasant
 Will make some distinction
 Between book and book,
 Between picture and picture;

Will bring from the market,
 Not picture of Blücher, 410
 But stupid "Milord,"

But Belinsky and Gógol!
 Oh, say, Russian people,
 These names—have you heard
 They're great. They were

¹ Well-known popular characters in

By your champions, who loved you,
Who strove in your cause,
'Tis *their* little portraits
Should hang in your houses !

" I'd walk into Heaven
But can't find the doorway ! " 420
Is suddenly shouted
By some merry blade.
" What door do you want, man ? "
" The puppet-show, brothers ! "
" I'll show you the way ! "

The puppet-show tempted
The journeying peasants ;
They go to inspect it.
A farce is being acted, 430
A goat for the drummer ;
Real music is playing—
No common accordion.
The play is not too deep,
But not stupid, either.
A bullet shot deftly
Right into the eye
Of the hated policeman.
The tent is quite crowded,
The audience cracking 440
Their nuts, and exchanging
Remarks with each other.
And look—there's the vodka !
They're drinking and looking,
And looking and drinking,
Enjoying it highly,
With jubilant faces,
From time to time throwing

THE VILLAGE FAIR

45

A right witty word
Into Peterkin's speeches, 450
Which *you'd* never hit on,
Although you should swallow
Your pen and your pad ! . . .

Some folk there are always
Who crowd on the platform
(The comedy ended).
To greet the performers,
To gossip and chat.

" How now, my fine fellows,
And where do you come from ? " 460

" As serfs we used only
To play for the masters,¹
But now we are free,
And the man who will treat us
Alone is our Master ! "

" Well spoken, my brothers ;
Enough time you've wasted
Amusing the nobles ;
Now play for the peasants !
Here, waiter, bring vodka, 470
Sweet wine, tea, and syrup.
And see you make haste ! "

The sweet sparkling river
Comes rolling to meet them ;
They'll treat the musicians
More handsomely, far,
Than their masters of old.

¹ Each landowner kept his own band of musicians.

It is not the rushing
 Of furious whirlwinds,
 Not Mother Earth shaking— 480
 'Tis shouting and singing
 And swearing and fighting
 And falling and kissing—
 The people's carouse !
 It seems to the peasants
 That all in the village
 Was reeling around them !
 That even the church
 With the very tall steeple
 Had swayed once or twice ! 490

When things are in this state,
 A man who is sober
 Feels nearly as awkward
 As one who is naked. . . .

The peasants recrossing
 The market-place, quitted
 The turbulent village
 At evening's approach.

CHAPTER III

E DRUNKEN NIGHT

This village did not end,
 As many in Russia,
 In windmill or tavern,

In corn-loft or barn,
But in a large building
Of wood, with iron gratings
In small narrow windows.
The broad, sandy high-road,
With borders of birch-trees,
Spread out straight behind it— 10
The grim étape—prison.¹
On week-days deserted
It is, dull and silent,
But now it is not so.
All over the high-road,
In neighbouring pathways,
Wherever the eye falls,
Are lying and crawling,
Are driving and climbing,
The numberless drunkards ; 20
Their shout fills the skies.

The cart-wheels are screeching,
And like slaughtered calves' heads
Are nodding and wagging
The pates limp and helpless
Of peasants asleep.

They're dropping on all sides,
As if from some ambush
An enemy firing
Is shooting them wholesale. 30
The quiet night is falling,
The moon is in Heaven,
And God is commencing
To write His great letter

¹ The halting-place for prisoners on their way to Siberia.

Of gold on blue velvet ;
Mysterious message,
Which neither the wise man
Nor foolish can read.

The high-road is humming
Just like a great bee-hive ;
The people's loud clamour
Is swelling and falling
Like waves in the ocean.

40

" We paid him a rouble—
The clerk, and he gave us
A written petition
To send to the Governor."

" Ili, you with the waggon,
Look after your corn ! "

" But where are you off to,
Olyénushka ? Wait now—
I've still got some cakes.
You're like a black flea, girl,
You eat all you want to
And hop away quickly
Before one can stroke you ! "

50

" It's all very fine talk,
This Tsar's precious Charter,
It's not writ for us ! "

" Give way there, you people ! " 60
The exciseman dashes
Amongst them, his brass plate
Attached to his coat-front,
And bells all a-jangle.

THE DRUNKEN NIGHT

49

“ God save us, Parasha,
Don't go to St. Petersburg !
I know the gentry :
By day you're a maid,
And by night you're a mistress.
You spit at it, love. . . .”

70

“ Now, where are you running ? ”
The pope bellows loudly
To busy Pavloosha,
The village policeman.

“ An accident's happened
Down here, and a man's killed.”

“ God pardon our sins ! ”

“ How thin you've got, Dashka ! ”

“ The spinning-wheel fattens
By turning forever ;
I work just as hard,
But I never get fatter.”

80

“ Heh, you, silly fellow,
Come hither and love me !
The dirty, dishevelled,
And tipsy old woman,
The f—i—ilthy o—l—d woman ! ”

Our peasants, observing,
Are still walking onwards.
They see just before them
A meek little fellow
Most busily digging
A hole in the road.

90

"Now, what are you doing?"
"A grave I am digging
To bury my mother!"

"You fool!—Where's your mother?
Your new coat you've buried!
Roll into the ditch,
Dip your snout in the water.
'Twill cool you, perhaps."

100

"Let's see who'll pull hardest!"
Two peasants are squatting,
And, feet to feet pressing,
Are straining and groaning.
And tugging away
At a stick held between them.
This soon fails to please them:
"Let's try with our beards!"
And each man then clutches
The jaw of the other,
And tugs at his beard!
Red, panting, and writhing,
And gasping and yelping,
But pulling and pulling!
"Enough there, you madmen! . . ."
Cold water won't part them!

110

And in the ditch near them
Two women are squabbling;
One cries, "To go home now
Were worse than to prison!"
The other, "You braggart!
In my house, I tell you,
It's worse than in yours.
One son-in-law punched me

120

THE DRUNKEN NIGHT

51

And left a rib broken ;
The second made off
With my big ball of cotton ;
The cotton don't matter,

 In it was hidden

130

My table in silver.

The youngest—he always
Is up with his knife out.

He'll kill me for sure ! ”

“ Enough, enough, darling !
Now don't you be angry ! ”

Is heard not far distant
From over a hillock—

“ Come on, I'm all right ! ”

A mischievous night, this ;
On right hand, on left hand,
Wherever the eye falls,
Are sauntering couples.

140

The wood seems to please them ;
They all stroll towards it,
The wood—which is thrilling
With nightingales' voices.

And later, the high-road
Gets more and more ugly,

And more and more often
The people are falling,

150

Are staggering, crawling,
Or lying like corpses.

As always it happens
On feast days in Russia--

No word can be uttered
Without a great oath.

And near to the tavern
Is quite a commotion ;

100

110

120

Some wheels get entangled
And terrified horses
Rush off without drivers.
Here children are crying,
And sad wives and mothers
Are anxiously waiting ;
And is the task easy
Of getting the peasant
Away from his drink ?

160

Just near to the sign-post
A voice that's familiar
Is heard by the peasants ;
They see there the Barin
(The same that helped Vavil,
And bought him the boots
To take home to his grandchild).
He chats with the men.

170

The peasants all open
Their hearts to the Barin ;
If some song should please him
They'll sing it through five times ;
" Just write the song down, sir ! "
If some saying strike him ;
" Take note of the words ! "

180

And when he has written
Enough, he says quietly,
" The peasants are clever,
But one thing is bad :
They drink till they're helpless
And lie about tipsy,
It's painful to see."

190

They listen in silence.
The Barin commences

160 To write something down
In the little black note-book
When, all of a sudden,
A small, tipsy peasant,
Who up to that moment
Has lain on his stomach
And gazed at the speaker,
Springs up straight before him 200
And snatches his pencil
Right out of his hand :
“ Wait, wait ! ” cries the fellow,
170 “ Stop writing your stories,
Dishonest and heartless,
About the poor peasant.
Say, what’s your complaint ?
That sometimes the heart
Of the peasant rejoices ?
At times we drink hard, 210
But we work ten times harder ;
Among us are drunkards,
But many more sober.
180 Go, take through a village
A pailful of vodka ;
Go into the huts—
In one, in another,
They’ll swallow it gladly.
But go to a third
And you’ll find they won’t touch it !
One family drinks, 221
While another drinks nothing,
Drinks nothing and suffers
As much as the drunkards :
190 They, wisely or foolishly,
Follow their conscience ;
And see how misfortune,

The peasants' misfortune,
Will swallow that household
Hard-working and sober !

230

Pray, have you seen ever
The time of the harvest
In some Russian village ?
Well, where were the people ?

At work in the tavern ?
Our fields may be broad,
But they don't give too freely.
Who robes them in spring-time,

And strips them in autumn ?
You've met with a peasant

240

At nightfall, perchance,
When the work has been finished ?
He's piled up great mountains
Of corn in the meadows,
He'll sup off a pea !

Hey, you mighty monster !
You builder of mountains,
I'll knock you flat down
With the stroke of a feather !

" Sweet food is the peasant's !
But stomachs aren't mirrors,
And so we don't whimper
To see what we've eaten.

250

" We work single-handed,
But when we have finished
Three partners¹ are waiting
To share in the profits ;
A fourth² one there is, too.
Who eats like a Tartar—

¹ The tax collector, the landlord, and the priest.

² Fire.

THE DRUNKEN NIGHT

55

Leaves nothing behind.

260

The other day, only,
A mean little fellow

Like you, came from Moscow
And clung to our backs.

Oh, please sing him folk-songs,
And 'tell him some proverbs,'
'Some riddles and rhymes.'

And then came another

To put us his questions :
How much do we work for ?

270

How much and how little
We stuff in our bellies ?

To count all the people
That live in the village

Upon his five fingers.

He did not *ask how much*

*The fire feeds the wind with
Of peasants' hard work.*

Our drunkenness, maybe,
Can never be measured,

280

But look at our labour—
Can that then be measured ?

Our cares or our woes ?

"The vodka prostrates us ;

But does not our labour,
Our trouble, prostrate us ?

The peasant won't grumble
At each of his burdens,

He'll set out to meet it,
And struggle to bear it ;

290

The peasant does not flinch
At life-wasting labour,

And tremble for fear

That his health may be injured
 Then why should he number
 Each cupful of vodka

For fear that an odd one
 May topple him over ?

You say that it's painful
 To see him lie tipsy !—

300

Then go to the bog ;
 You'll see how the peasant
 Is squeezing the corn out,
 Is wading and crawling

Where no horse or rider,
 No man, though unloaded,
 Would venture to tread.

You'll see how the army
 Of profligate peasants
 Is toiling in danger,

310

Is springing from one clod
 Of earth to another,

Is pushing through bog-slime
 With backs nearly breakin'
 The sun's beating down

On the peasants' bare heads,
 They are sweating and covered
 With mud to the eyebrows.

Their limbs torn and bleeding
 By sharp, prickly bog-grass !

320

“ Does this picture please you ?
 You say that you suffer ;
 At least suffer wisely.

Don't use for a peasant

A gentleman's judgement ;
 We are not white-handed
 And tender-skinned creatures,

THE DRUNKEN NIGHT

57

But men rough and lusty
In work and in play.

“The heart of each peasant 330
Is black as a storm-cloud,

Its thunder should peal
And its blood rain in torrents ;

But all ends in drink—
For after one cupful

The soul of the peasant
Is kindly and smiling ;

But don't let that hurt you !
Look round and be joyful !

Hey, fellows ! Hey, maidens ! 340

You know how to foot it !

Their bones may be aching,

Their limbs have grown weary,

But youth's joy and daring

Is not quite extinguished,

It lives in them yet !”

The peasant is standing
On top of a hillock,

And stamping his feet,

And after being silent

A moment, and gazing

With glee at the masses

Of holiday people,

He roars to them hoarsely. 350

“Hey you, peasant kingdom !
You, hatless and drunken !

More racket ! More noise !”

“Come, what's your name, uncle ?”

“To write in the note-book ?”

Why not ? Write it down : 360
 ' In Barefoot the village
 Lives old Jacob Naked,
 He'll work till he's taken,
 He drinks till he's crazed.'"
 The peasants are laughing,
 And telling the Barin
 The old fellow's story :
 How shabby old Jacob
 Had lived once in Peter,¹
 And got into prison 370
 Because he bethought him
 To get him to law
 With a very rich merchant ;
 How after the prison
 He'd come back amongst them
 All stripped, like a linden,
 And taken to ploughing.
 For thirty years since
 On his narrow allotment
 He'd worked in all weathers, 380
 The harrow his shelter
 From sunshine and storm.
 He lived with the sokha,²
 And when God would take him
 He'd drop from beneath it
 Just like a black clod.
 An accident happened
 One year to old Jacob :
 He bought some small pictures
 To hang in the cottage 390
 For his little son ;

¹ Popular name for Petrograd.

² The primitive wooden plough still used by the peasants in Russia.

THE DRUNKEN NIGHT

59

The old man himself, too,
 Was fond of the pictures.
 God's curse had then fallen ;
 The village was burnt,
 And the old fellow's money,
 The fruit of a life-time
 (Some thirty-five roubles),¹
 Was lost in the flames.
 He ought to have saved it,
 But, to his misfortune,
 He thought of the pictures
 And seized them instead.
 His wife in the meantime
 Was saving the icons.²
 And so, when the cottage
 Fell in, all the roubles
 Were melted together
 In one lump of silver.
 Old Jacob was offered
 Eleven such roubles
 For that silver lump.

400

410

" O old brother Jacob,
 You paid for them dearly,
 The little chap's pictures !
 I warrant you've hung them
 Again in the new hut."

" I've hung them—and more,"
 He replied, and was silent.

The Barin was looking,
 Examining Jacob,

420

¹ Three pounds. ² Holy pictures of the saints.

The toiler, the earth-worm,
 His chest thin and meagre,
 His stomach as shrunk
 As though something had crushed it,
 His eyes and mouth circled
 By numberless wrinkles,
 Like drought-shrivelled earth.
 And he altogether
 Resembled the earth,
 Thought the Barin, while noting
 His throat, like a dry lump
 Of clay, brown and hardened ;
 His brick-coloured face ;
 His hands—black and horny,
 Like bark on the tree-trunk ;
 His hair—stiff and sandy. . . .

430

The peasants, remarking
 That old Jacob's speech
 Had not angered the Barin,
 Themselves took his words up :
 " Yes, yes, he speaks truly,
 We must drink, it saves us,
 It makes us feel strong.
 Why, if we did not drink
 Black gloom would engulf us.
 If work does not kill us
 Or trouble destroy us,
 We shan't die from drink ! "

440

" That's so. Is it not, sir ? "
 " Yes, God will protect us ! "
 " Come, drink with us, Barin ! "

450

They go to buy vodka

THE DRUNKEN NIGHT

61

And drink it together.

To Jacob the Barin

Has offered two cups.

"Ah, Barin," says Jacob,

"I see you're not angry.

A wise little head, yours,

And how could a wise head

Judge falsely of peasants?

Why, only the pig

Glues his nose to the garbage

And never sees Heaven!"

Then suddenly singing

Is heard in a chorus

Harmonious and bold.

A row of young fellows,

Half drunk, but not falling.

Come staggering onwards,

All lustily singing;

They sing of the Volga,

The daring of youths

And the beauty of maidens

A hush falls all over

The road, and it listens;

And only the singing

Is heard, broadly rolling

In waves, sweet and tuneful.

Like wind-ruffled corn.

The hearts of the peasants

Are touched with wild anguish,

And one little woman

Grows pensive and mournful.

And then begins weeping

And sighs forth her grief:

"My life is like day-time

With no sun to warm it !
My life is like night
With no glimmer of moon ! 490
And I—the young woman—
Am like the swift steed
On the curb, like the swallow
With wings crushed and broken :
My jealous old husband
Is drunken and snoring.
But even while snoring
He keeps one eye open,
And watches me always,
Me—poor little wife ! ” 500

And so she lamented,
The sad little woman ;
Then all of a sudden
Springs down from the waggon !
“ Where now ? ” cries her husband,
The jealous old man.
And just as one lifts
By the tail a plump radish,
He clutches her pig-tail,
And pulls her towards him. 510

O night wild and drunken,
Not bright—and yet star-lit,
Not hot—but fanned softly
By tender spring breezes,
You’ve not left our peasants
Untouched by your sweetness ;
They’re thinking and longing
For their little women.
And they are quite right too ;
Still sweeter ’twould be
With a nice little wife ! 520

THE DRUNKEN NIGHT

63

490 Cries Ívan, "I love you,"
And Mariushka, "I you!"
Cries Ívan, "Press closer!"
And Mariushka, "Kiss me!"
Cries Ívan, "The night's cold,"
And Mariushka, "Warm me!"

They think of this song now,
And all make their minds up
To shorten the journey.

530

500 A birch-tree is growing
Alone by the roadside,
God knows why so lonely!
And under it spreading
The magic white napkin,
The peasants sit round it:

510 "Hey! Napkin enchanted!
Give food to the peasants!"
Two hands have come floating
From no one sees where,
Place a bucket of vodka,
A large pile of bread,
On the magic white napkin,
And dwindle away.

540

520 The peasants feel strengthened,
And leaving Román there
On guard near the vodka,
They mix with the people,
To try to discover
The one who is happy.

550

They're all in a hurry
To turn towards home.

CHAPTER IV

THE HAPPY ONES

In crowds gay and noisy
Our peasants are mixing,
Proclaiming their mission :
“ Let any man here
Who esteems himself happy
Stand forth ! If he prove it
A pailful of vodka
Is at his disposal ;
As much as he wishes
So much he shall have ! ”

10

This fabulous promise
Sets sober folk smiling ;
The tipsy and wise ones
Are ready to spit
In the beards of the pushing
Impertinent strangers !
But many are willing
To drink without payment,
And so when our peasants
Go back to the birch-tree
A crowd presses round them.
The first to come forward,
A lean discharged deacon,
With legs like two matches,
Lets forth a great mouthful
Of indistinct maxims :
That happiness lies not
In broad lands, in jewels,
In gold, and in sables -

20

THE HAPPY ONES

65

"In what, then?"

30

A peaceful

And undisturbed conscience.

That all the dominions
Of land-owners, nobles,

And Tsars are but earthly
And limited treasures;

But he who is godly
Has part in Christ's kingdom
Of boundless extent:

"When warm in the sun,
With a cupful of vodka,
I'm perfectly happy,
I ask nothing more!"

40

"And who'll give you vodka?"
"Why, you! You have promised."

"Be off, you lean scamp!"

A one-eyed old woman
Comes next, bent and pock-marked.

And bowing before them
She says she is happy;

50

That in her allotment
A thousand fine turnips
Have grown, this last autumn.

"Such turnips, I tell you!
Such monsters! and tasty!

In such a small plot, too,
In length only one yard,
And three yards in width!"

They laugh at the woman,
But give her no vodka;

60

“ Go, get you home, Mother !
You’ve vodka enough there
To flavour the turnips ! ”

A soldier with medals,
Quite drunk but still thirsty,
Says firmly, “ I’m happy ! ”

“ Then tell us, old fellow,
In what he is happy
The soldier ? Take care, though,
To keep nothing back ! ”

70

“ Well, firstly, I’ve been
Through at least twenty battles,
And yet I’m alive.
And, secondly, mark you
(It’s far more important),
In times of peace, too,
Though I’m always half-famished,
Death never has conquered !
And, third, though they flogged me
For every offence,
Great or small, I’ve survived it ! ”

80

“ Here, drink, little soldier !
With you one can’t argue ;
You’re happy indeed ! ”

Then comes a young mason,
A huge, weighty hammer
Swung over his shoulder ;
“ I live in content,”
He declares, “ with my wife
And beloved old mother ;
We’ve nought to complain of.”

9

THE HAPPY ONES

67

“ In what are you happy ? ”
“ In this ! ”—like a feather
He swings the great hammer.
“ Beginning at sunrise
And setting my back straight
As midnight draws near,
I can shatter a mountain !
Before now, it's happened
That, working one day,
I've piled enough stones up
To earn my five roubles ! ”

100

Pakhóm tries to lift it
The “ happiness.” After
Prodigiously straining
And cracking all over,
He sets it down, gladly,
And pours out some vodka.

“ Well, weighty it is, man !
But will you be able
To bear in old age
Such a ‘ happiness,’ think you ? ”

110

“ Don't boast of your strength ! ”
Gasped a wheezing old peasant,
Half stifled with asthma.
(His nose pinched and shrivelled
Like that of a dead man,
His eyes bright and sunken.
His hands like a rake—
Stiffened, scraggy, and bony.
His legs long and narrow
Like spokes of a wheel.
A human mosquito.)

120

PART I. CHAPTER IV

“ I was not a worse man
Than he, the young mason,
And boasted of *my* strength.
God punished me for it !

The manager knew
I was simple—the villain !
He flattered and praised me. 130
I was but a youngster,

And pleased at his notice
I laboured like four men.

One day I had mounted
Some bricks to my shoulder,

When, just then, the devil
Must bring him in sight.

“ ‘ What’s that ! ’ he said laughing,
‘ ‘Tis surely not Trifon

With such a light burden ? 140

Ho, does it not shame

Such a strapping young fellow ? ’

‘ Then put some more bricks on,

I’ll carry them, master,’

Said I, sore offended.

For full half an hour

I stood while he piled them,

He piled them—the dog !

I felt my back breaking,

But would not give way,

And that devilish burden

I carried right up

To the high second story !

He stood and looked on,

He himself was astounded,

And cried from beneath me :

Well done, my brave fellow !

THE HAPPY ONES

69

You don't know yourself, man,
What you have been doing!

It's forty stone, Trifon,
You've carried up there!

160

"I *did* know; my heart
Struck my breast like a hammer.

The blood stood in circles
Round both of my eyeballs;
My back felt disjointed,
My legs weak and trembling . . .

'Twas then that I withered.
Come, treat me, my friends!"

"But why should we treat you?
In what are you happy?

171

In what you have told us?"

"No, listen—that's coming.
It's this: I have also,

Like each of us peasants,
Besought God to let me

Return to the village
To die. And when coming

From Petersburg, after
The illness I suffered

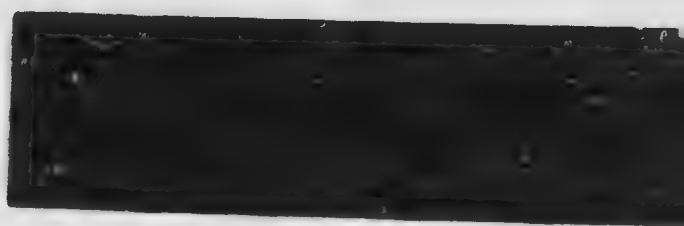
180

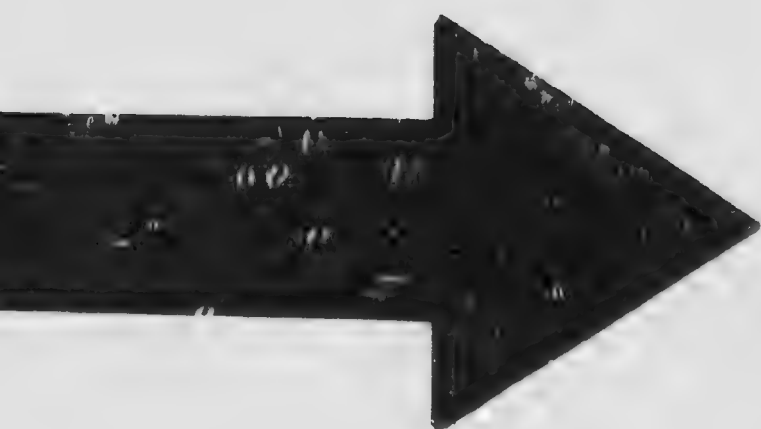
Through what I have told you,
Exhausted and weakened,

Half-dazed, half-unconscious.
I got to the station.

And all in the carriage
Were workmen, as I was.

And ill of the fever;
And all yearned for one thing:
To reach their own homes





MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART

ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2



1.0



1.1



1.25



1.4



1.6



2.8



3.2



3.6



4.0



2.5



2.2



2.0



1.8



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100...
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Before death overcame them.

190

'Twas then I was lucky ;
The heat then was stifling,
And so many sick heads
Made Hell of the waggon.

Here one man was groaning,
There, rolling all over
The floor, like a lunatic,
Shouting and raving
Of wife or of mother.

And many such fellows

200

Were put out and left
At the stations we came to.

I looked at them, thinking,
Shall I be left too ?

I was burning and shaking,
The blood began starting
All over my eyeballs,
And I, in my fever,

Half-waking, was dreaming
Of cutting of cocks' throats

210

(We once were cock-farmers,
And one year it happened
We fattened a thousand).

They came to my thoughts, now,
The damnable creatures,

I tried to start praying,

But no !—it was useless.
And, would you believe me ?

I saw the whole party
In that hellish waggon

220

Come quivering round me,
Their throats cut, and spurting
With blood, and still crowing.

And I, with the knife, shrieked :

190 ' Enough of your noise ! '
And yet, by God's mercy,
Made no sound at all.

I sat there and struggled
To keep myself silent.

At last the day ended, 230
And with it the journey,
And God had had pity
Upon His poor orphan ;
I crawled to the village.
And now, by His mercy,
I'm better again."

" Is that what you boast of --
Your happiness, peasant ? "

Exclaims an old lackey
With legs weak and gouty. 240

" Treat me, little brothers,
I'm happy, God sees it !

For I was the chief serf
Of Prince Pereméteff.

A rich prince, and mighty,
My wife, the most favoured

By him, of the women ;
My daughter, together

With his, the young lady,
Was taught foreign languages. 250

French and some others ;
And she was permitted

To *sit*, and not stand,
In her mistress's presence.

Good Lord ! How it bites ! "

(He stoops down to rub it,
The gouty right knee-cap.)
The peasants laugh loudly !

"What laugh you at, stupids?"

He cries, getting angry, 260

'I'm ill, I thank God,

And at waking and sleeping

I pray, 'Leave me ever

My honoured complaint, Lord!

For that makes me noble!'

I've none of your low things,

Your peasants' diseases,

My illness is lofty,

And only acquired

By the most elevated, 270

The first in the Empire;

I suffer, you villains,

From gout, gout its name is!

It's only brought on

By the drinking of claret,

Of Burgundy, champagne,

Hungarian syrup,

By thirty years' drinking!

For forty years, peasants,

I've stood up behind it— 280

The chair of His Highness,

The Prince Pereméteff,

And swallowed the leavings

In plates and in glasses,

The finest French truffles,

The dregs of the liquors.

Come, treat me, you peasants!"

"Excuse us, your Lordship,

Our wine is but simple,

The drink of the peasants!

It wouldn't suit *you*!" 290

260 A bent, yellow-haired man
Steals up to the peasants.

A man from White Russia.
He yearns for the vodka.

"Oh, give me a taste!"
He implores, "I am happy!"

"But wait! You must tell us
In what you are happy."

270 "In bread I am happy; 300
At home, in White Russia,
The bread is of barley,
All gritty and weedy.

At times, I can tell you,
I've howled out aloud,

Like a woman in labour,
With pains in my stomach!

But now, by God's mercy,
I work for Gubónine.

280 And there they give rye-bread. 310
I'm happy in that."

A dark-looking peasant,
With jaw turned and twisted,

Which makes him look sideways,
Says next, "I am happy.

A bear-hunter I am.

And six of my comrades

Were killed by old Mishka;¹
On me God has mercy."

290 "Look round to the left side." 320

¹ The Russian nickname for the bear.

He tries to, but cannot,
For all his grimaces !

“ A bear knocked my jaw round,
A savage young female.”

“ Go, look for another,
And give her the left cheek,
She'll soon put it straight ! ”

They laugh, but, however,
They give him some vodka.
Some ragged old beggars
Come up to the peasants,
Drawn near by the smell
Of the froth on the vodka :
They say they are happy.

33

“ Why, right on his threshold
The shopman will meet us !
We go to a house-door,
From there they conduct us
Right back to the gate !
When we begin singing
The housewife runs quickly
And brings to the window
A loaf and a knife.
And then we sing loudly,
‘ Oh, give us the whole loaf,
It cannot be cut
And it cannot be crumbled,
For you it is quicker,
For us it is better ! ’ ”

34

THE HAPPY ONES

75

The peasants observe 350

That their vodka is wasted,
The pail's nearly empty.

They say to the people,
" Enough of your chatter,
You, shabby and ragged,
You, humpbacked and corny,
Go, get you all home ! "

" In your place, good strangers,"
The peasant, Fedócy,
From " Swallow-Smoke " village, 360
Said, sitting beside them,

33 " I'd ask Érmil Gírin.
If he will not suit you,
If he is not happy,
Then no one can help you."

" But who is this Érmil,
A noble—a prince ? "

" No prince—not a noble,
But simply a peasant."

34 " Well, tell us about him." 370

" I'll tell you ; he rented
The mill of an orphan,
Until the Court settled
To sell it at auction.

Then Érmil, with others,
Went into the sale-room.

The small buyers quickly
Dropped out of the bidding ;
Till Érmil alone,
With a merchant, Altérnikoff. 380
Kept up the fight.

The merchant outbid him,
Each time by a farthing,
Till Érmil grew angry
And added five roubles ;
The merchant a farthing
And Érmil a rouble.
The merchant gave in then,
When suddenly something
Unlooked for occurred :
The sellers demanded
A third of the money
Paid down on the spot ;
'Twas one thousand roubles,
And Érmil had not brought
So much money with him ;
'Twas either his error,
Or else they deceived him.
The merchant said gaily,
'The mill comes to me, then ?'
'Not so,' replied Érmil ;
He went to the sellers ;
'Good sirs, will you wait
Thirty minutes ?' he asked.

390

400

“ ‘ But how will that help you ? ’
‘ I’ll bring you the money.’ ”

“ ‘ But where will you find it ?
You’re out of your senses !
It’s thirty-five versts
To the mill ; in an hour now
The sales will be finished.’ ”

410

“ ‘ You’ll wait half an hour, sirs ? ’
‘ An hour, if you wish.’ ”

Then Érmil departed,
The sellers exchanging
Sly looks with the merchant,
And grinning—the foxes !
But Érmil went out
And made haste to the market-place
Crowded with people 420

('Twas market-day, then).
And he mounted a waggon,
And there he stood crossing
Himself, and low bowing
In all four directions.

He cried to the people,
' Be silent a moment,
I've something to ask you ! '
The place became still
And he told them the story : 430

" ' Since long has the merchant
Been wooing the mill,
But I'm not such a dullard.
Many times have I been here
If there *would* be
A second day's bidding,

They answered, " There will."

You know that the peasant
Won't carry his money
All over the by-ways
Without a good reason, 440

So I have none with me ;
And look—now they tell me
There's no second bidding
And ask for the money !

The cunning ones tricked me
And laughed—the base heathens !

And said to me sneering :

“ But, what can you do
In an hour ? Where find money ? ” 45

“ They’re crafty and strong,
But the people are stronger !

The merchant is rich
But the people are richer !

Hey ! What is *his* worth
To *their* treasury, think you ?

Like fish in the ocean
The wealth of the people ;
You’ll draw it and draw it—
But not see it send ! 46

Now, brother, God hears me,
Come, give me this money !

Next Friday I’ll pay you
The very last farthing.

It’s not that I care
For the mill—it’s the insult !

Whoever knows Érmil,
Whoever believes him,
Will give what he can.’

“ A miracle happened :
The coat of each peasant
Flew up on the left
As though blown by a wind !

The peasants are bringing
Their money to Érmil,

Each gives what he can.
Though Érmil’s well lettered

He writes nothing down ;
It’s well he can count it

So great is his hurry. 48

They gather his hat full
Of all kinds of money,
From farthings to bank-notes,
The notes of the peasant
All crumpled and torn.

He has the whole sum now,
But still the good people
Are bringing him more.

“ ‘ Here, take this, too, Érmil,
You’ll pay it back later ! ’ ” 490

“ He bows to the people
In all four directions,
Gets down from the waggon,
And pressing the hat
Full of money against him,
Runs back to the sale-room
As fast as he can.

“ The sellers are speechless
And stare in amazement,
The merchant turns green
As the money is counted
And laid on the table. ” 500

“ The sellers come round him
All craftily praising
His excellent bargain.
But Érmil sees through them ;
He gives not a farthing,
He speaks not a word.

“ The whole town assembles
At market next Friday,
When Érmil is paying ” 510

His debt to the people.
How can he remember
To whom he must pay it ?
No murmur arises,
No sound of discussion,
As each man tells quietly
The sum to be paid him.

“ And Érmil himself said,
That when it was finished 520
A rouble was lying
With no one to claim it ;
And though till the evening
He went, with purse open,
Demanding the owner,
It still was unclaimed.
The sun was just setting
When Érmil, the last one
To go from the market,
Assembled the beggars 530
And gave them the rouble.” . . .

“ ‘Tis strange ! ” say the peasants,
“ By what kind of magic
Can one single peasant
Gain such a dominion
All over the country ? ”

“ No magic he uses
Save truthfulness, brothers !
But say, have you ever
Heard tell of Prince Yurloff’s 540
Estate, Adovshina ? ”

“ We have. What about it ? ”
“ The manager there

Was a Colonel, with stars,
Of the Corps of Gendarmes.
He had six or seven
Assistants beneath him,
And Érmil was chosen
As principal clerk.

He was but a boy, then, 550
Of nine een or twenty ;
And though 'tis no fine post,
The clerk's—to the peasants
The clerk is a great man ;
To him they will go

For advice and with questions.
Though Érmil had power to,
He asked nothing from them ;
And if they should offer
He never accepted. 560

(He bears a poor conscience,
The peasant who covets
The mite of his brother !)

Well, five years went by,
And they trusted in Érmil,
When all of a sudden
The master dismissed him
For sake of another.

And sadly they felt it.
The new clerk was grasping ; 570
He moved not a finger
Unless it was paid for ;

A letter—three farthings !
A question—five farthings !
Well, he was a pope's son
And God placed him rightly !
But still, by God's mercy,
He did not stay long :

"The old Prince soon died,
And the young Prince was master.

580

He came and dismissed them—
The manager-colonel,

The clerk and assistants,
And summoned the peasants

To choose them an Elder.
They weren't long about it!

And eight thousand voices
Cried out, 'Érmil Gírin!'

As though they were one.
Then Érmil was sent for

590

To speak with the Barin.
And after some minutes

The Barin came out
On the balcony, standing

In face of the people;
He cried, 'Well, my brothers,

Your choice is elected
With my princely sanction!

But answer me this:

Don't you think he's too youthful?' 600

" 'No, no, little Father!
He's young, but he's wise!'

"So Érmil was Elder,
For seven years ruled

In the Prince's dominion.
Not once in that time

Did a coin of the peasants
Come under his nail,

Did the innocent suffer,
The guilty escape him,

610

He followed his conscience."

THE HAPPY ONES

83

580 " But stop ! " exclaimed hoarsely

A shrivelled grey pope,

Interrupting the speaker,

590 " The harrow went smoothly

Enough, till it happened

To strike on a stone,

Then it swerved of a sudden.

In telling a story

Don't leave an odd word out

620

And alter the rhythm !

Now, if you knew Ėrmil

590 You knew his young brother,

Knew Mityenka, did you ? "

The speaker considered,

Then said, " I'd forgotten,

I'll tell you about it :

It happened that once

Even Ėrmil the peasant

Did wrong : his young brother, 630

Unjustly exempted

600 From serving his time,

On the day of recruiting ;

And we were all silent,

And how could we argue

When even the Barin

Himself would not order

The Elder's own brother

To unwilling service ?

And only one woman,

640

Old Vlasevna, shedding

Wild tears for her son,

Went bewailing and screaming :

610 ' It wasn't our turn ! '

Well, of course she'd be certain

To scream for a time,
Then leave off and be silent.
But what happened then?
The recruiting was finished,
But Érmil had changed ; 65
He was mournful and gloomy ;
He ate not, he drank not,
Till one day his father
Went into the stable

And found him there holding
A rope in his hands.

Then at last he unbosomed
His heart to his father :

‘ Since Vláševna’s son
Has been sent to the service,
I’m weary of living,
I wish but to die ! ’ 66

His brothers came also,
And they with the father
Besought him to hear them,
To listen to reason.

But he only answered :
‘ A villain I am,

And a criminal ; bind me,
And bring me to justice ! ’ 67

And they, fearing worse things,
Obeyed him and bound him.

The commune assembled,
Exclaiming and shouting ;

They’d never been summoned
To witness or judge

Such peculiar proceedings.

‘ And Érmil’s relations
Did not beg for mercy

THE HAPPY ONES

85

And lenient treatment,
But rather for firmness :

680

‘ Bring Vláševna’s son back
Or Érmil will hang himself,

Nothing will save him ! ’

And then appeared Érmil

Himself, pale and bare-foot,
With ropes bound and handcuffed,

And bowing his head

He spoke low to the people :

‘ The time was when I was
Your judge ; and I judged you.

690

In all things obeying

My conscience. But I now

Am guiltier far

Than were you. Be my judges ! ’

He bowed to our feet,

The demented one, sighing,

Then stood up and crossed himself,

Trembling all over ;

It pained us to witness

700

How he, of a sudden,

Fell down on his knees there

At Vláševna’s feet.

Well, all was put right soon,

The nobles have fingers

In every small corner,

The lad was brought back

And young Mityenka started ;

They say that his service

Did not weigh too heavy,

71

The prince saw to that.

And we, as a penance,

Imposed upon Érmil

A fine, and to Vláševna

PART I. CHAPTER IV

One part was given,
To Mitya another,
The rest to the village
For vodka. However,
Not quickly did Ėrmil
Get over his sorrow :

720

He went like a lost one
For full a year after,
And—though the whole district
Implored him to keep it—
He left his position.

He rented the mill, then,
And more than of old
Was beloved by the people.
He took for his grinding
No more than was honest,

730

His customers never
Kept waiting a moment,
And all men alike :
The rich landlord, the workman,
The master and servant,
The poorest of peasants
Were served as their turn came :
Strict order he kept.

Myself, I have not been
Since long in that district.

740

But often the people
Have told me about him.
And never could praise him
Enough. So in your place
I'd go and ask Ėrmil."

"Your time would be wasted."
The grey-headed pope,
Who'd before interrupted.

THE HAPPY ONES

87

20
730
Remarked to the peasant.
" I knew Érmil Girin,
I chanced in that district
Some five years ago.

I have often been shifted,
Our bishop loved vastly
To keep us all moving,
So I was his neighbour.

Yes, he was a peasant
Unique, I bear witness,
And all things he owned
That can make a man happy :

Peace, riches, and honour,
And that kind of honour

Most valued and precious,
Which cannot be purchased

By might or by money,
But only by righteousness,
Wisdom and kindness.

But still, I repeat it,

Your time will be wasted
In going to Érmil :
In prison he lies."

" How's that ? "

740
" God so willed it.
You've heard how the peasants
Of ' Log ' the Pomyéshchick
Of Province ' Affrighted,'
Of District ' Scarce-Breathing,'
Of village ' Dumbfounded,'
Revolted ' for causes
Entirely unknown,'

As they say in the papers.

780

(I once used to read them.)

And so, too, in this case,
The local Ispravnik,¹

The Tsar's high officials,
And even the peasants,

'Dumbfounded' themselves,
Never fathomed the reason

Of all the disturbance.
But things became bad.

700

And the soldiers were sent for,
The Tsar packed a messenger

Off in a hurry
To speak to the people.

His epaulettes rose
To his ears as he coaxed them
And cursed them together.

But curses they're used to,
And coaxing was lost,

800

For they don't understand it :

'Brave orthodox peasants !'
'The Tsar—Little Father !'

'Our dear Mother Russia !'
He bellowed and shouted

Until he was hoarse,
While the peasants stood round him
And listened in wonder.

"But when he was tired
Of these peaceable measures

810

Of calming the riots,
At length he decided

On giving the order
Of 'Fire' to the soldiers :
When all of a sudden

¹ Chief of police.

A bright thought occurred
 To the clerk of the Volost :¹
 The people trust Girin,
 The people will hear him !

“ Then let him be brought ! ”²
 * * * *

A cry has arisen
 “ Have mercy ! Have mercy ! ”

820

A check to the story ;
 They hurry off quickly
 To see what has happened ;
 And there on a bank
 Of a ditch near the roadside,
 Some peasants are birching
 A drunken old lackey,
 Just taken in thieving.

A court had been summoned.
 The judges deciding
 To birch the offender,
 That each of the jury
 (About three and twenty)
 Should give him a stroke
 Turn in turn of the rod. . .

830

The lackey was up
 And made off, in a twinkling.
 He took to his heels
 Without stopping to argue,
 On two scraggy legs.

840

“ How he trips it — the dandy ! ”
 The peasants cry, laughing ;

¹ An administrative unit consisting of a group of villages.

The end of the story is omitted because of the interference of the Censor.

They've soon recognized him ;
The boaster who prated
So much of his illness
From drinking strange liquors.

" Ho ! where has it gone to,
Your noble complaint ?
Look how nimble he's getting ! " 850

" Well, well, Little Father,
Now finish the story ! "

" It's time to go home now,
My children,—God willing,
We'll meet again some day
And finish it then. . . . "

The people disperse
As the dawn is approaching.
Our peasants begin
To bethink them of sleeping,
When all of a sudden
A " troika " ¹ comes flying
From no one sees where,
With its silver bells ringing.
Within it is sitting
A plump little Barin,
His little mouth smoking
A little cigar.

The peasants draw up
In a line on the roadway,
Thus barring the passage
In front of the horses ;
And, standing bareheaded,
Bow low to the Barin.

¹ A three-horsed carriage.

CHAPTER V

THE POMYÉSHCHICK

850 The "troika" is drawing
The local Pomyéshchick
Gavríl Afanásich
Obólt-Oboldoóeff.

A portly Pomyéshchick.
With long grey moustaches,
Some sixty years old.

His bearing is stately,
His cheeks very rosy,

He wears a short top-coat. 10
Tight-fitting and braided,

Hungarian fashion ;
And very wide trousers.

860 Gavríl Afanásich
Was probably startled

At seeing the peasants
Unflinchingly barring
The way to his horses ;

He promptly produces
A loaded revolver 20

As bulky and round
As himself ; and directs it
Upon the intruders :

870 " You brigands ! You cut-throats !
Don't move, or I shoot ! "

" How can we be brigands ? "

The peasants say, laughing,
" No knives and no pitchforks,
No hatchets have we ! "

"Who are you? And what
Do you want?" said the Barin.

30

"A trouble torments us.
It draws us away
From our wives, from our children,
Away from our work,
Kills our appetites too.
Do give us your promise
To answer us truly,
Consulting your conscience
And searching your knowledge.
Not sneering, nor feigning
The question we put you.
And then we will tell you
The cause of our trouble."

40

"I promise. I give you
The oath of a noble."

"No, don't give us that—
Not the oath of a noble!
We're better content
With the word of a Christian.
The nobleman's oaths
They are given with curses,
With kicks and with blows!
We are better without them!"

50

"Eh-heh, that's a new creed!
Well, let it be so, then.
And what is your trouble?"

"But put up the pistol!
That's right! Now we'll tell you:

THE POMYÉSHCHICK

93

We are not assassins,
But peaceable peasants,
From Government 'Hard-pressed,'
From District 'Most Wretched,'
From 'Destitute' Parish,
From neighbouring hamlets, -
'Patched,' 'Bare-Foot,' and 'Shabby,'
'Bleak,' 'Burnt-out,' and 'Hungry.'
From 'Harvestless,' too.

60

We met in the roadway,
And one asked another,
Who is he—the man
Free and happy in Russia?
Luká said, 'The pope,'
And Roman, 'The Pomyéshchick,'
Demyán, 'The official.'

70

'The round-bellied merchant,'
Said both brothers Goóbin,
Mitródor and Ívan;
Pakhóm said, 'His Highness,
The Tsar's Chief Adviser,'
And Prov said, 'The Tsar.'

80

"Like bulls are the peasants;
Once folly is in them
You cannot dislodge it,
Although you should beat them
With stout wooden cudgels,
They stick to their folly,
And nothing can move them!
We argued and argued,
While arguing quarrelled,
While quarrelling fought,
Till at last we decided
That never again

90

Would we turn our steps homeward
 To kiss wives and children,
 To see the old people,
 Until we have settled
 The subject of discord;
 Until we have found
 The reply to our question
 Of who can, in Russia,
 Be happy and free ?

100

" Now tell us, Pomyéshchick,
 Is your life a sweet one ?
 And is the Pomyéshchick
 Both happy and free ? "

Gavríl Afanásich
 Springs out of the " troika "
 And comes to the peasants.
 He takes—like a doctor
 The hand of each one,
 And carefully feeling
 The pulse gazes searchingly
 Into their faces.

110

Then clasps his plump sides
 And stands shaking with laughter.
 The clear, hearty laugh
 Of the healthy Pomyéshchick
 Peals out in the pleasant
 Cool air of the morning :

120

" Ha-ha ! Ha-ha-ha ! "
 Till he stops from exhaustion.
 And then he addresses
 The wondering peasants :
 " Put on your hats, gentlemen.
 Please to be seated ! "

THE POMYÉSHCHICK

95

(He speaks with a bitter ¹
And mocking politeness.)

"But we are not gentry ;
We'd rather stand up 130
In your presence, your worship."

"Sit down, worthy *citizens*,
Here on the bank."

The peasants protest,
But, on seeing it useless,
Sit down on the bank.

"May I sit beside you ?
Hey, Proshka ! Some sherry,
My rug and a cushion !"
He sits on the rug. 140
Having finished the sherry,
Thus speaks the Pomyéshchick :

"I gave you my promise
To answer your question. . . .
The task is not easy,
For though you are highly
Respectable people,
You're not very learned.
Well, firstly, I'll try
To explain you the meaning 150
Of Lord, or Pomyéshchick.
Have you, by some chance,
Ever heard the expression

¹ The Pomyéshchick is still bitter because his serfs
have been set free by the Government.

The 'Family Tree'?

Do you know what it means?"

"The woods are not closed to us.
We have seen all kinds
Of trees," say the peasants.

"Your shot has miscarried!
I'll try to speak clearly;

166

I come of an ancient,
Illustrious family;
One, Oboldoóeff,

My ancestor, is

Amongst those who were mentioned
In old Russian chronicles

Written for certain
Two hundred and fifty
Years back. It is written.

'Twas given the Tartar,
Obólt-Oboldoóeff.

170

A piece of cloth, value
Two roubles, for having
Amused the Tsaritsa
Upon the Tsar's birthday
By fights of wild beasts,
Wolves and foxes. He also
Permitted his own bear
To fight with a wild one,
Which mauled Oboldoóeff,
And hurt him severely.'

180

And now, gentle peasants,
Did you understand?"

"Why not? To this day
One can see them—the loafers
Who stroll about leading
A bear!"

THE POMYÉSHCHICK

97

" Be it so, then !
 But now, please be silent,
 And hark to what follows :
 From this Oboldoóeff
 My family sprang ;
 And this incident happened
 Two hundred and fifty
 Years back, as I told you,
 But still, on my mother's side,
 Even more ancient
 The family is :
 Says another old writing :
 Prince Schépin, and one
 Vaska Goóseff, attempted
 To burn down the city
 Of Moscow. They wanted
 To plunder the Treasury.
 They were beheaded.
 And this was, good peasants,
 Full three hundred years back !
 From these roots it was
 That our Family Tree sprang."

190

200

" And you are the . . . as one
 Might say . . . little apple
 Which hangs on a branch
 Of the tree," say the peasants.

210

" Well, apple, then, call it,
 So long as it please you.
 At least you appear
 To have got at my meaning.
 And now, you yourselves
 Understand—the more ancient
 A family is

220

H

The more noble its members.
Is that so, good peasants ? ..

"That's so," say the peasants.
"The black bone and white bone
Are different, and they must
Be differently honoured."

"Exactly. I see, friends,
You quite understand me."
The Barin continued :

"In past times we lived,
As they say, 'in the bosom
Of Christ,' and we knew
What it meant to be honoured !
Not only the people
Obeyed and revered us,
But even the earth
And the waters of Russia. . . .
You knew what it was

23

To be One, in the centre
Of vast, spreading lands,
Like the sun in the heavens :
The clustering villages

240

Yours, yours the meadows.
And yours the black depths
Of the great virgin forests !
You pass through a village ;
The people will meet you.
Will fall at your feet ;
Or you stroll in the forest :
The mighty old trees
Bend their branches before you.
Through meadows you saunter :
The slim golden corn-stems

25

THE POMYÉSHCHICK

99

Rejoicing, will curtsy
 With winning caresses,
 Will hail you as Master.
 The little fish sports
 In the cool little river;
 Get fat, little fish,
 At the will of the Master! 260
 The little hare speeds
 Through the green little meadow;
 Speed, speed, little hare,
 Till the coming of autumn,
 The season of hunting,
 The sport of the Master.
 And all things exist
 But to gladden the Master.
 Each wee blade of grass
 Whispers lovingly to him, 270
 'I live but for thee. . . .'

240 "The joy and the beauty,
 The pride of all Russia -
 The Lord's holy churches-
 Which brighten the hill-sides
 And gleam like great jewels
 On the slopes of the valleys,
 Were rivalled by one thing
 In glory, and that
 Was the nobleman's manor. 280
 Adjoining the manor
 Were glass-houses sparkling.
 And bright Chinese arbours,
 While parks spread around it.
 On each of the buildings
 Gay banners displaying
 Their radiant colours,

And beckoning softly,
 Invited the guest
 To partake of the pleasures
 Of rich hospitality. 29
 Never did Frenchmen
 In dreams even picture
 Such sumptuous revels
 As we used to hold.
 Not only for one day,
 Or two, did they last
 But for whole months together!
 We fattened great turkeys,
 We brewed our own liquors, 300
 We kept our own actors,
 And troupes of musicians,
 And legions of servants!
 Why, I kept five cooks,
 Besides pastry-cooks, working,
 Two blacksmiths, three carpenters,
 Eighteen musicians,
 And twenty-two huntsmen. . . .
 My God! . . .”

The afflicted 310
 Pomyéshchick broke down here,
 And hastened to bury
 His face in the cushion. . . .
 “Hey, Proshka!” he cried,
 And then quickly the lackey
 Poured out and presented
 A glassful of brandy.
 The glass was soon empty.
 And when the Pomyéshchick
 Had rested awhile,
 He again began speaking: 320

THE POMYÉSHCHICK

101

" Ah, then, Mother Russia,
 How gladly in autumn
 Your forests awoke
 To the horn of the huntsman !
 Their dark, gloomy depths,
 Which had saddened and faded,
 Were pierced by the clear
 Ringing blast, and they listened,
 Revived and rejoiced,
 To the laugh of the echo.
 The hounds and the huntsmen
 Are gathered together,
 And wait on the skirts
 Of the forest : and with them
 The Master ; and farther
 Within the deep forest
 The dog-keepers, roaring
 And shouting like madmen,
 The hounds all a-bubble
 Like fast-boiling water.
 Hark ! There's the horn calling !
 You hear the pack yelling ?
 They're crowding together !
 And where's the red beast ?
 Hoo-loo-loo ! Hoo-loo-loo !
 And the sly fox is ready ;
 Fat, furry old Reynard
 Is flying before us,
 His bushy tail waving !
 The knowing hounds crouch,
 And each lithe body quivers.
 Suppressing the fire
 That is blazing within it :
 ' Dear guests of our hearts,
 Do come nearer and greet us.

100

310

350

We're panting to meet you.

We, hale little fellows!

Come nearer to us

And away from the bushes!

36

"They're off! Now, my horse,

Let your swiftness not fail me!

My hounds, you are staunch

And you will not betray me!

Hoo-loo! Faster, faster!

Now, *at him*, my children! . . .

Gavril Afanásich

Springs up, wildly shouting,

His arms waving madly,

He dances around them!

37

He's certainly after

A fox in the forest!

The peasants observe him

In silent enjoyment,

They smile in their beards. . . .

"Eh . . . you, mad, merry hunters!

Although he forgets

Many things—the Pomyéshchick—

Those hunts in the autumn

Will not be forgotten.

38

'Tis not for our own loss

We grieve, Mother Russia,

But you that we pity;

For you, with the hunting

Have lost the last traces

Of days bold and warlike

That made you majestic. . . .

"At times, in the autumn,

A party of fifty

THE POMYÉSHCHICK

103

Would start on a hunting tour ; 390
Then each Pomyéshchick
Brought with him a hundred
Fine dogs, and twelve keepers,
And cooks in abundance.

And after the cooks
Came a long line of waggons
Containing provisions.

And as we went forward
With music and singing,
You might have mistaken 100
Our band for a fine troop
Of cavalry, moving !

The time flew for us
Like a falcon." How lightly
The breast of the nobleman
Rose, while his spirit
Went back to the days
Of Old Russia, and greeted
The gallant Boyárin.¹ . . .

"No whim was denied us.
To whom I desire

I show mercy and favour ;
And whom I dislike
I strike dead on the spot.
The law is my wish,
And my fist is my hangman !
My blow makes the sparks crowd.
My blow smashes jaw-bones,
My blow scatters teeth ! . . .

Like a string that is broken. 120
The voice of the nobleman
Suddenly ceases ;

¹ The Russian warriors of olden times.

He lowers his eyes
 To the ground, darkly frowning . . .
 And then, in a low voice,
 He says :

" You yourselves know
 That strictness is needful ;
 But I, with love, punished.
 The chain has been broken, 13
 The links burst asunder ;
 And though we do not beat
 The peasant, no longer
 We look now upon him
 With fatherly feelings.
 Yes, I was severe too
 At times, but more often
 I turned hearts towards me
 With patience and mildness.

" Upon Easter Sunday 44
 I kissed all the peasants
 Within my domain.
 A great table, loaded
 With ' Paska ' and ' Koólich ' 1
 And eggs of all colours,
 Was spread in the manor.
 My wife, my old mother,
 My sons, too, and even
 My daughters did not scorn
 To kiss 2 the last peasant : 45
 ' Now Christ has arisen ! '
 ' Indeed He has risen ! '

¹ Russian Easter dishes.

² Russians embrace one another on Easter Sunday, recalling the resurrection of Christ.

The peasants broke fast then,
Drank vodka and wine,
Before each great holiday,
In my best staterooms
The All-Night Thanksgiving
Was held by the pope.

My serfs were invited
With every inducement :

466

‘ Pray hard now, my children,
Make use of the chance,
Though you crack all your foreheads ! ’
The nose suffered somewhat,

Wrought all the women-folk
Out of a village
To scrub down the floors.

You see 'twas a cleansing
Of souls, and a strengthening
Of spiritual union ;
Now, isn't that so ? ”

479

"That's so," say the peasants,
But each to himself thinks,

“ They needed persuading
With sticks though, I warrant,
To get them to pray
In your Lordship’s fine manor ! ”

"I'll say, without boasting,
They loved me—my peasants.

481

In my large Surminsky Estate, where the peasants Were mostly odd-jobbers,

¹ The Russians press their foreheads to the ground while worshipping.

Or very small tradesmen,
It happened that they
Would get weary of staying
At home, and would ask
My permission to travel,
To visit strange parts
At the coming of spring.
They'd often be absent
Through summer and autumn.
My wife and the children
Would argue while guessing
The gifts that the peasants
Would bring on returning.
And really, besides
Lawful dues of the 'Barin'
In cloth, eggs, and live stock,
The peasants would gladly
Bring gifts to the family :
Jam, say, from Kiev,
From Astrakhan fish,
And the richer among them
Some silk for the lady.
You see !—as he kisses
Her hand he presents her
A neat little packet !
And then for the children
Are sweetmeats and toys ;
For me, the old toper,
Is wine from St. Petersburg —
Mark you, the rascal
Won't go to the Russian
For that ! He knows better—
He runs to the Frenchman !
And when we have finished
Admiring the presents

490

500

510

THE POMYÉSHCHICK

107

I go for a stroll
And a chat with the peasants ; 520

They talk with me freely.
My wife fills their glasses,
My little ones gather
Around us and listen,
While sucking their sweets.
To the tales of the peasants :
Of difficult trading,

Of places far distant,
Of Petersburg, Astrakhan,
Kazan, and Kiev. . . . 530

On such terms it was
That I lived with my peasants.
Now, wasn't that nice ? "

" Yes," answer the peasants ;
" Yes, well might one envy
The noble Pomyéshchick !
His life was so sweet
There was no need to leave it."

" And now it is past. . . .
It has vanished for ever ! 540
Hark ! There's the bell tolling ! "

They listen in silence :
In truth, through the stillness
Which settles around them,
The slow, solemn sound
On the breeze of the morning
Is borne from Kusminsky. . . .

" Sweet peace to the peasant !
God greet him in Heaven ! "

The peasants say softly,
And cross themselves thrice :
And the mournful Pomyésh hick
Uncovers his head.

As he piously crosses
Himself, and he answers :

" 'Tis not for the peasant
The knell is now tolling,

It tolls the lost life
Of the stricken Pomyéshchick.

Farewell to the past,
And farewell to thee, Russia,

The Russia who cradled
The happy Pomyéshchick.

Thy place has been stolen
And filled by another ! . . .

"Heh, Proshka !" (The brandy
Is given, and quickly

He empties the glass.)

"Ob, it isn't consoling
To witness the change

In thy face, oh, my Motherland !
Truly one fancies

The whole race of nobles
Has suddenly vanished !

Wherever one goes, now,
One falls over peasants

Who lie about, tipsy.

One meets not a creature
But exche official.

Or stupid 'Posrédnik,'¹

Or Poles who've been banished.

One sees the troops passing,

¹ The official appointed to arrange terms between
the Pomyéshchicks and their emancipated serfs

And then one can guess
That a village has somewhere
Revolted, 'in thankful
And dutiful spirit. . . .'

In old days, these roads
Were made gay by the passing
Of carriage, 'dormeuse,'
And of six-in-hand coaches, 590

And pretty, light troikas ;
And in them were sitting

The family troop
Of the jolly Pomyéshchick :
The stout, buxom mother,
The fine, roguish sons,

And the pretty young daughters ;
One heard with enjoyment

The chiming of large bells,
The tinkling of small bells, 600

Which hung from the harness.
And now ? . . . What distraction

Has life ? And what joy
Does it bring the Pomyéshchick ?

At each step, you meet
Something new to revolt you ;

And when in the air
You can smell a rank graveyard,
You know you are passing
A nobleman's manor ! 610

My Lord ! . . . They have pillaged
The beautiful dwelling !

They've pulled it all down,
Brick by brick, and have fashioned

The bricks into hideously
Accurate columns !

The broad shady park

Of the outraged Pomyéshehick,
The fruit of a hundred years'
Careful attention,

620

Is falling away
'Neath the axe of a peasant !

The peasant works gladly,
And greedily reckons

The number of logs
Which his labour will bring him.

His dark soul is closed
To refinement of feeling,
And what would it matter

630

To him, if you told him

That this stately oak
Which his hatchet is felling

My grandfather's hand
Had once planted and tended ;
That under this ash-tree

My dear little children,
My Vera and Gánushka,

Echoed my voice
As they played by my side ;
That under this linden

640

My young wife confessed me
That little Gavrióushka.

Our best-beloved first-born,
Lay under her heart,

As she nestled against me
And bashfully hid

Her sweet face in my bosom
As red as a cherry. . . .

It is to his profit
To ravish the park.

650

And his mission delights him.
It makes one ashamed now

620 To pass through a village ;
The peasant sits still
And he dreads not of bowing.

One feels in one's breast
Not the pride of a noble
But wrath and repentment.
The axe of the robber

Resounds in the forest, 660
It maddens your heart,
But you cannot prevent it,
For who can you summon

630 To rescue your forest ?
The fields are half-laboured,
The seeds are half-wasted,
No trace left of order. . . .

O Mother, my country,
We do not complain
For ourselves—of our sorrows, 670
Our hearts bleed for thee :

Like a widow thou standest
In helpless affliction
With tresses dishevelled
And grief-stricken face. . . .

640 They have blighted the forest,
The noisy low taverns
Have risen and flourished.

They've picked the most worthless
And loose of the people, 680

And given them power
In the posts of the Zemstvos ;
They've seized on the peasant
And taught him his letters.

650 Much good may it do him !
Your brow they have branded,
As felons are branded,

As cattle are branded,

With these words they've stamped it :

'To take away with you 69.

Or drink on the premises.'

Was it worth while, pray,

To weary the peasant

With learning his letters

In order to read them ?

The land that we keep

Is our mother no longer,

Our stepmother rather.

And then to improve things,

These pert good-for-nothings, 700

These impudent writers

Must needs shout in chorus :

'But whose fault, then, is it,

That you thus exhausted

And wasted your country ?'

But I say—you duffers !

Who *could* foresee this ?

They babble, 'Enough

Of your lordly pretensions !

It's time that you learnt something, 71

Lazy Pomyéshechicks !

Get up, now, and work !'

"Work ! To whom, in God's name,
Do you think you are speaking ?

I am not a peasant

In 'laputs,' good madman !

I am—by God's mercy

A Noble of Russia.

You take us for Germans !

We nobles have tender

And delicate feelings,

Our pride is inborn,
And in Russia our classes
Are not taught to work.
Why, the meanest official
Will not raise a finger
To clear his own table,
Or light his own stove !
I can say, without boasting,
That though I have lived
Forty years in the country,
And scarcely have left it,
I could not distinguish
Between rye and barley.
And they sing of 'work' to me !

730

"If we Pomyéshchicks
Have really mistaken
Our duty and calling,
If really our mission
Is not, as in old days,
To keep up the hunting,
To revel in luxury,
Live on forced labour,
Why did they not tell us
Before ? Could I learn it ?
For what do I see ?
I've worn the Tsar's livery,
'Sullied the Heavens,'
And 'squandered the treasury
Gained by the people,'
And fully imagined
To do so for ever,
And now . . . God in Heaven ! . . ."
The Barin is sobbing ! . . .

740

750

The kind-hearted peasants
Can hardly help crying
Themselves, and they think :
“ Yes, the chain has been broken,
The strong links have snapped,
And the one end recoiling
Has struck the Pomyéshchick.
The other—the peasant.”

700

PART II

THE LAST POMYÉSHCHICK

PROLOGUE

THE day of St. Peter
And very hot weatner ;
The mowers are all
At their work in the meadows.
The peasants are passing
A tumble-down village.
Called " Ignorant-Duffers,"
Of Volost " Old-Dustmen,"
Of Government " Know-Nothing."
They are approaching 10
The banks of the Volga.
They come to the river,
The sea-gulls are wheeling
And flashing above it ;
The sea-hens are walking
About on the sand-banks ;
And in the bare hayfields,
Which look just as naked
As any youth's cheek
After yesterday's shaving, 20
The Princes Volkonsky ¹

¹ The havstacks.

Are haughtily standing,
 And round them their children,
 Who (unlike all others)
 Are born at an earlier
 Date than their sires.

"The fields are enormous,"
 Remarks old Pakhóm,

"Why, the folk must be giants."

The two brothers Goóbin
 Are smiling at something;
 For some time they've noticed
 A very tall peasant

Who stands with a pitcher
 On top of a haystack;

He drinks, and a woman
 Below, with a hay-fork,
 Is looking at him

With her head leaning back.

The peasants walk on
 Till they come to the haystack;

The man is still drinking;
 They pass it quite slowly,

Go fifty steps farther,
 Then all turn together

And look at the haystack.
 Not much has been altered:

The peasant is standing
 With body bent back

As before,—but the pitcher
 Has turned bottom upwards. . . .

The strangers go farther.

The camps are thrown out
 On the banks of the river;
 And there the old people

And children are gathered,
 And horses are waiting
 With big empty waggons ;
 And then, in the fields
 Behind those that are finished, 60
 The distance is filled
 By the army of workers,
 The white shirts of women,
 The men's brightly coloured,
 And voices and laughter,
 With all intermingled
 The hum of the scythes. . . .

" God help you, good fellows ! "
 " Our thanks to you, brothers ! "

The peasants stand noting 70
 The long line of mowers,
 The poise of the scythes
 And their sweep through the sunshine.
 The rhythmical swell
 Of melodious murmur.

The timid grass stands
 For a moment, and trembles,
 Then falls with a sigh. . . .

On the banks of the Volga
 The grass has grown high 80
 And the mowers work gladly.
 The peasants soon feel
 That they cannot resist it.
 " It's long since we've stretched ourselves,
 Come, let us help you ! "
 And now seven women

Have yielded their places.
 The spirit of work
 Is devouring our peasants ;
 Like teeth in a ravenous
 Mouth they are working
 The muscular arms,
 And the long grass is falling
 To songs that are strange
 To this part of the country,
 To songs that are taught
 By the blizzards and snow-storms,
 The wild savage winds
 Of the peasants' own homelands :
 "Bleak," "Burnt-Out," and "Hungry,"¹⁰⁰
 "Patched," "Bare-Foot," and "Shabby,"
 And "Harvestless," too. . . .
 And when the strong craving
 For work is appeased
 They sit down by a haystack.

"From whence have you come ?"
 A grey-headed old peasant
 (The one whom the women
 Call Vlásuchka) asks them,
 "And where are you going ?"

110

"We are—" say the peasants,
 Then suddenly stop,
 There's some music approaching !

"Oh, that's the Pomyéshchick
 Returning from boating !"
 Says Vlásuchka, running
 To busy the mowers :
 "Wake up ! Look alive there !
 And mind—above all things,

PROLOGUE

119

Don't heat the Pomyéshehick
And don't make him angry !
And if he abuse you.

120

Bow low and say nothing,
And if he should praise you,
Start lustily cheering.

You women, stop cackling !
And get to your forks !¹

A big burly peasant
With beard long and bushy

121

Bestirs himself also
To busy them all,

Then puts on his "kaftan,"¹
And runs away quickly

To meet the Pomyéshehick.

And now to the bank-side

Three boats are approaching.

In one sit the servants

And band of musicians,

Most busily playing ;

The second one groans

140

Neath a mountainous wet-nurse,

Who dandles a baby,

A withered old dry-nurse,

A motionless body

Of ancient retainers.

And then in the third

There are sitting the gentry :

Two beautiful ladies

(One slender and fair-haired,

One heavy and black-browed)

150

And two moustached Barins

And three little Barins,

¹ A long-skirted coat.

And last—the Pomyéshchick,
 A very old man
 Wearing long white moustaches
 (He seems to be all white) ;
 His cap, broad and high-crowned,
 Is white, with a peak,
 In the front, of red satin.
 His body is lean
 As a hare's in the winter,
 His nose like a hawk's beak,
 His eyes—well, they differ :
 The one sharp and shining,
 The other—the left eye—
 Is sightless and blank,
 Like a dull leaden farthing.
 Some woolly white poodles
 With tufts on their ankles
 Are in the boat too.

160

170

The old man alighting
 Has mounted the bank,
 Where for long he reposes
 Upon a red carpet
 Spread out by the servants.
 And then he arises
 To visit the mowers,
 To pass through the fields
 On a tour of inspection.
 He leans on the arm—
 Now of one of the Barins,
 And now upon those
 Of the beautiful ladies.
 And so with his suite—
 With the three little Barins,
 The wet-nurse, the dry-nurse,

180

PROLOGUE

121

The ancient retainers,
The woolly white poodles,
Along through the hayfields
Proceeds the Pomyéshechick.

190

The peasants on all sides
Bow down to the ground ;
And the big, burly peasant
(The Elder he is
As the peasants have noticed)
Is cringing and bending
Before the Pomyéshechick,
Just like the Big Devil
Before the high altar :

"Just so ! Yes, Your Highness, 200
It's done, at your bidding !"

I think he will soon fall
Before the Pomyéshechick
And roll in the dust. . . .

So moves the procession,
Until it stops short
In the front of a haystack
Of wonderful size,
Only this day erected.

210

The old man is poking
His forefinger in it,
He thinks it is damp,
And he blazes with fury :

"Is this how you rot
The best goods of your master ?
I'll rot you with barsechin,¹
I'll make you repent it !
Undo it—at once !"

¹ The forced labour of the serfs for their owners.

The Elder is writhing
In great agitation :

" I was not quite careful
Enough, and it *is* damp.

It's my fault, Your Highness ! "

He summons the peasants,
Who run with their pitchforks
To punish the monster.

And soon they have spread it
In small heaps around,

At the feet of the master ;
His wrath is appeased.

(In the meantime the strangers
Examine the hay—

It's like tinder—so dry !)

A lackey comes flying
Along, with a napkin ;

He's lame—the poor man !

" Please, the luncheon is served."

And then the procession,

The three little Barins,

The wet-nurse, the dry-nurse,

The ancient retainers,

The woolly white poodles,

Moves onward to lunch.

The peasants stand watching :

From one of the boats

Comes an outburst of music

, greet the Pomyéshechick.

The table is shining
All dazzlingly white

PROLOGUE

123

On the bank of the river,
The strangers, astonished,
Draw near to old Vlásuchka ;
" Pray, little Uncle,"
They say, " what's the meaning
Of all these strange doings ?
And who is that curious
Old man ? "

" Our Pomýéshechick,
The great Prince Yutiátin."

" But why is he fussing
About in that manner ?
For things are all changed now,
And he seems to think
They are still as of old.
The hay is quite dry,
Yet he told you to dry it ! "

" But funnier still
That the hay and the hayfields
Are not his at all."

" Then whose are they ? "

270

" The Commune's."

" Then why is he poking
His nose into matters
Which do not concern him ?
For are you not free ? "

" Why, yes, by God's mercy
The order is changed now
For us as for others ;
But ours is a special case."

" Tell us about it."

280

124 THE LAST POMYÉSHCHICK

The old man lay down
At the foot of the haystack
And answered them—nothing.

The peasants producing
The magic white napkin
Sit down and say softly,
“O napkin enchanted,
Give food to the peasants!”
The napkin unfolds,
And two hands, which come floating
From no one sees where, 291
Place a bucket of vodka,
A large pile of bread
On the magic white napkin,
And dwindle away. . . .

The peasants, still wishing
To question old Vlásuchka,
Wisely present him
A cupful of vodka :
“Now come, little Uncle, 300
Be gracious to strangers,
And tell us your story.”

“There’s nothing to tell you.
You haven’t told me yet
Who *you* are and whence
You have journeyed to these parts,
And whither you go.”

“We will not be surly
Like you. We will tell you.
We’ve come a great distance,
And seek to discover 310
A thing of importance.

A trouble torments us,
It draws us away
From our work, from our homes,
From the love of our food. . . ."

The peasants then tell him
About their chance meeting,

Their argument, quarrel,
Their vow, and decision ;

320

Of how they had sought
In the Government "Tight-Squeeze"

And Government "Shot-Strewn"

The man who, in Russia,
Is happy and free. . . .

Old Vlásuchka listens,
Observing them keenly.

"I see," he remarks,
When the story is finished,

"I see you are very
Peculiar people.

330

We're said to be strange here,
But you are still stranger."

"Well, drink some more vodka
And tell us your tale."

And when by the vodka
His tongue becomes loosened,
Old Vlásuchka tells them
The following story.

I

THE DIE-HARD

" The great prince, Yutiátin,
The ancient Pomyéshchick,
Is very eccentric.
His wealth is untold,
And his titles exalted,
His family ranks
With the first in the Empire.
The whole of his life
He has spent in amusement,
Has known no control
Save his own will and pleasure.
When we were set free
He refused to believe it :
' They lie ! the low scoundrels ! '
There came the posrédnik
And Chief of Police,
But he would not admit them,
He ordered them out
And went on as before,
And only became
Full of hate and suspicion :
' Bow low, or I'll flog you
To death, without mercy ! '
The Governor himself came
To try to explain things,
And long they disputed
And argued together ;
The furious voice
Of the prince was heard raging
All over the house,
And he got so excited

10

20

30

That on the same evening
A stroke fell upon him :
His left side went dead,
Black as earth, so they tell us,
And all over nothing !
It wasn't his pocket
That pinched, but his pride
That was touched and enraged him.
He lost but a mite
And would never have missed it."

40

" Ah, that's what it means, friends,
To be a Pomyéshchick,
The habit gets into
The blood," says Mitródor,
" And not the Pomyéshchick's
Alone, for the habit
Is strong in the peasant
As well," old Pakhóm said.

50

" I once on suspicion
Was put into prison,
And met there a peasant
Called Sédor, a strange man,
Arrested for horse-stealing,
If I remember ;

And he from the prison
Would send to the Barin
His taxes. (The prisoner's
Income is scanty.

60

He gets what he begs
Or a trifle for working.)
The others all laughed at him ;
' Why should you send them

And you off for life
To hard labour ? ' they asked him.

80

128 THE LAST POMYÉSHCHICK

But he only said,
‘All the same . . . it is better.’”

“Well, now, little Uncle,
Go on with the story.”

“A mite is a small thing,
Except when it happens
To be in the eye!

70

The Pomyéshchick lay senseless,
And many were sure

That he'd never recover.
His children were sent for,

Those black-moustached footguards
(You saw them just now

With their wives, the fine ladies),
The eldest of them

80

Was to settle all matters
Concerning his father.

He called the posrédnik
To draw up the papers

And sign the agreement,
When suddenly—there

Stands the old man before them!
He springs on them straight

Like a wounded old tiger,
He bellows like thunder.

90

It was but a short time
Ago, and it happened

That I was then Elder,
And chanced to have entered

The house on some errand,
And I heard myself

How he cursed the Pomyéshchicks;
The words that he spoke

I have never forgotten:

THE DIE-HARD

129

'The Jews are reproached
 For betraying their Master;
 But what are *you* doing?
 The rights of the nobles
 By centuries sanctioned
 You fling to the beggars!'

He said to his sons,
 'Oh, you dastardly cowards!
 My children no longer!
 It is for small reptiles—
 The pope's crawling breed—
 To take bribes from vile traitors,
 To purchase base peasants,
 And they may be pardoned!
 But you!—you have sprung
 From the house of Yutiátin,
 The Princes Yu-tiá-tin
 You are! Go! . . . Go, leave me!
 You pitiful puppies!'

The heirs were alarmed;
 How to tide matters over
 Until he should die?
 For they are not small items,
 The forests and lands
 That belong to our father;
 His money-bags are not
 So light as to make it
 A question of nothing
 Whose shoulders shall bear them;
 We know that our father
 Has three 'private' daughters
 In Petersburg living,
 To Generals married,
 So how do we know
 That they may not inherit

100

110

120

130

His wealth ? . . . The Pomyéshchick
 Once more is prostrated,
 His death is a question
 Of time, and to make it
 Run smoothly till then
 An agreement was come to,
 A plan to deceive him :
 So one of the ladies
 (The fair one, I fancy,
 She used at that time
 To attend the old master
 And rub his left side
 With a brush), well, she told him
 That orders had come
 From the Government lately
 That peasants set free
 Should return to their bondage.
 And he quite believed it.
 (You see, since his illness
 The Prince had become
 Like a child.) When he heard it
 He cried with delight ;
 And the household was summoned
 To prayer round the icons ;¹
 And Thanksgiving Service
 Was held by his orders
 In every small village,
 And bells were set ringing.
 And little by little
 His strength returned partly,
 And then as before
 It was hunting and music,
 The servants were caned

140

150

160

¹ Holy images.

And the peasants were punished.

The heirs had, of course,
Set things right with the servants, 170

A good understanding
They came to, and one man

(You saw him go running
Just now with the napkin)

Did not need persuading
He so loved his Barin.

His name is Ipát.

And when we were made free

He refused to believe it ;

' The great Prince Yutiátin 180

Be left without peasants !

What pranks are you playing ? '

At last, when the ' Order
Of Freedom ' was shown him.

Ipát said, ' Well, well,

Get you gone to your pleasures,

But I am the slave

Of the Princes Yutiátin ! '

He cannot get over

The old Prince's kindness 190

To him, and he's told us

Some curious stories

Of things that had happened

To him in his childhood.

His youth and old age.

(You see, I had often

To go to the Prince

On some matter or other

Concerning the peasants,

And waited and waited 200

For hours in the kitchens,

And so I have heard them

A hundred times over.)
'When I was a young man
Our gracious young Prince
Spent his holidays sometimes
At home, and would dip me
(His meanest slave, mind you)
Right under the ice
In the depths of the Winter.
He did it in such
A remarkable way, too !
He first made two holes
In the ice of the river,
In one he would lower
Me down in a net—
Pull me up through the other !'
And when I began
To grow old, it would happen
That sometimes I drove
With the Prince in the Winter ;
The snow would block up
Half the road, and we used
To drive five-in-a-file.
Then the fancy would strike him
(How whimsical, mark you !)
To set me astride
On the horse which was leading,
Me—last of his slaves !
Well, he dearly loved music,
And so he would throw me
A fiddle : " Here ! play now,
Ipát." Then the driver
Would shout to the horses,
And urge them to gallop.
The snow would half-blind me,
My hands with the music

219

220

230

Were occupied both ;
So what with the jolting,
The snow, and the fiddle,
240
Ipât, like a silly
Old noodle, would tumble.

Of course, if he landed
Right under the horses
The sledge must go over
His ribs,—who could help it ?

But that was a trifle ;
The cold was the worst thing,
It bites you, and you
Can do nothing against it !
250

The snow lay all round
On the vast empty desert,
I lay looking up

At the stars and confessing
My sins. But—my friends,
220
This is true as the Gospel—

I heard before long
How the sledge-bells came ringing,
Drew nearer and nearer :
The Prince had remembered,
260
And come back to fetch me !'

“(The tears began falling
And rolled down his face
At this part of the story.

230
Whenever he told it
He always would cry
Upon coming to this !)

‘ He covered me up
With some rugs, and he warmed me.
He lifted me up,
270
And he placed me beside him,

Me—last of his slaves—

Beside his Princely Person !
And so we came home.' ”

They're amused at the story.

Old Vlásuchka, when

He has emptied his fourth cup,
Continues : “ The heirs came

And called us together—
The peasants and servants ;

They said, ‘ We’re distressed
On account of our father.

These changes will kill him,
He cannot sustain them.

So humour his weakness :

Keep silent, and act still
As if all this trouble

Had never existed ;

Give way to him, bow to him
Just as in old days.

For each stroke of barschin,
For all needless labour,

For every rough word
We will richly reward you.

He cannot live long now,
The doctors have told us

That two or three months
Is the most we may hope for.

Act kindly towards us,
And do as we ask you,

And we as the price
Of your silence will give you

The hayfields which lie
On the banks of the Volga.

Think well of our offer,

280

290

300

And let the posrédnik
Be sent for to witness
And settle the matter.'

"Then gathered the commune
To argue and clamour ;

The thought of the hayfields
(In which we are sitting),

With promises boundless
And plenty of vodka,

Decided the question :
The commune would wait
For the death of the Barin.

"Then came the posrédnik,
And laughing, he said :

'It's a capital notion !

The hayfields are fine, too,
You lose nothing by it ;

You just play the fool
And the Lord will forgive you.

You know, it's forbidden
To no one in Russia
To bow and be silent.'

"But I was against it :

I said to the peasants,

'For you it is easy,

But how about me ?

Whatever may happen

The Elae must come

To accounts with the Barin,

And how can I answer

His babyish questions ?

And how can I do

His nonsensical bidding ?'

THE LAST POMYÉSHCHICK

Just take off your hat
And bow low, and say nothin.
And then you walk out
And the thing's at an end.
The old man is ill,
He is weak and forgetful,
And nothing will stay
In his head for an instant.'

Perhaps they were right
To deceive an old madman
Is not very hard.
But for my part, I don't want
To play at buffoon.
For how many years
Have I stood on the threshold
And bowed to the Barin?
Enough for my pleasure
I said, 'If the commane
Is pleased to be ruled
By a crazy Pomyéshchick
To ease his last moments,
I don't disagree.
I have nothing against it
But then, set me free
From my duties as Elder

350

"The whole matter nearly
Fell through at that moment
But then Klink Lávin said
'Let me be Elder
'If please you on both sides
The master and you.
The Lord will soon take him,
And then the inheritance
Will come to the young man

37

I swear I'll establish
such order amongst you
You'll be a good man!

"The community took long
To consider his offer :

And despite the fact
I Klibbott was a
good

50

And not

N. lover of

And companion of the

A good

good

offer

W. Klibbott, he will tell you :

you will never

rich as a fine fellow ;

You'll never get rich,—

but you're sure to get crippled !

But all the same

Is in the matters ;

I've been to St. Petersburg.

Yes, to Moscow

Siberia, too,

the merchants.

ty he was

ever returned !

ever enough,

can't keep a farthing ;

hard—but he's always

In the kind of trouble.

He's picked some fine words up

From out of his travels :

'Our Fatherland dear.'

400

And 'The soul of great Russia,'
And 'Moscow, the mighty,
Illustrious city!'

'And I,' he will shout,
'Am a plain Russian peasant!'
And striking his forehead
He'll swallow the vodka.

410

A bottle at once
He'll consume, like a mouthful.
He'll fall at your feet
For a bottle of vodka.

But if he has money
He'll share with you, freely;

420

The first man he meets
May partake of his drink.

He's clever at shouting
And cheating and fooling,
At showing the best side
Of goods which are rotten,
At boasting and lying;

And when he is caught
He'll slip out through a cranny,
And throw you a jest,
Or his favourite saying:

430

'A crack in the jaw
Will your honesty bring you!'

"Well, after much thinking
The commune decided

That I must remain
The responsible Elder;

But Klímka might act
In my stead to the Barin
As though he were Elder.
Why, then, let him do it!

440

THE DIE-HARD

139

The right kind of Elder
He is for his Barin,
They make a fine pair !
Like putty his conscience ;
Like Meenin's ¹ his beard,
So that looking upon him
You'd think a sedater.
More dutiful peasant
Could never be found.

The heirs made his kaftan, 450
And he put it on,

And from Klimka the 'scapegrace',
He suddenly changed

Into Klím, Son-of-Jacob,²
Most worthy of Elders.
So that's how it is ;—

And to our great misfortune
The Barin is ordered
A carriage-drive daily.

Each day through the village 460
He drives in a carriage
That's built upon springs.

Then up you jump, quickly,
And whip off your hat,

And, God knows for what reason,
He'll jump down your throat,

He'll upbraid and abuse you ;
But you must keep silent.

He watches a peasant 470
At work in the fields,

¹ Meenin—a famous Russian patriot in the beginning of the seventeenth century. He is always represented with an immense beard.

² It is a sign of respect to address a person by his own name and the name of his father.

And he swears we are lazy
And lie-abled sluggards
(Though never worked peasant
With half such a will
In the time of the Barin).

He has not a notion
That they are not *his* fields,
But ours. When we gather
We laugh, for each peasant
Has something to tell

480

Of the crazy Pomyéshchick ;
His ears burn, I warrant,
When we come together !
And Klím, Son-of-Jacob,
Will run, with the manner
Of bearing the commune
Some news of importance
(The pig has got proud
Since he's taken to scratching
His sides on the steps
Of the nobleman's manor).

490

He runs and he shouts :
' A command to the commune !
I told the Pomyéshchick
That Widow Teréntevna's
Cottage had fallen.
And that she is begging
Her bread. He commands you
To marry the widow
To Gabriel Jóckoff ;

500

To rebuild the cottage,
And let them reside there
And multiply freely.'

"The bride will be seventy,

Seven the bridegroom !
Well, who could help laughing ?
Another command :

‘ The dull-witted cows,
Driven out before sunrise,
Awoke the Pomyéshechick 510
By foolishly mooing
While passing his courtyard.
The cow-herd is ordered
To see that the cows
Do not moo in that manner ! ’ ”

The peasants laugh loudly.

“ But why do you laugh so ?
We all have our fancies.

Yakútsk was once governed,
I heard, by a General ; 520
He had a liking

For sticking live cows
Upon spikes round the city,
And every free spot

Was adorned in that manner,
As Petersburg is,

So they say, with its statues,
Before it had entered

The heads of the people
That he was a madman. 530

“ Another strict order
Was sent to the commune :

‘ The dog which belongs
To Sofrónoff the watchman
Does not behave nicely,
It barked at the Barin.

Be therefore Sofrónoff
Dismissed. Let Evrémka
Be watchman to guard
The estate of the Barin.
(Another loud laugh.

54

For Evrémka, the 'simple,'
Is known as the deaf-mute
And fool of the village).
But Klímka's delighted :
At last he's found something
That suits him exactly.
He bustles about

And in everything meddles,
And even drinks less.

550

There's a sharp little woman
Whose name is Orévna,
And she is Klím's gossip.
And finely she helps him
To fool the old Barin.

And as to the women,
They're living in clover :
They run to the manor

With linen and mushrooms
And strawberries, knowing
The ladies will buy them
And pay what they ask them
And feed them besides.

560

We laughed and made game
Till we fell into danger
And nearly were lost :

There was one man among us,
Petrov, an ungracious

And bitter-tongued peasant ;
He never forgave us

570

Because we'd consented

To humour the Barin.

‘The Tsar,’ he would say,

‘Has had mercy upon you,

And now, you, yourselves

Lift the load to your backs.

To Hell with the hayfields !

We want no more masters !’

We only could stop him

By giving him vodka

580

(His weakness was vodka).

The devil must needs

Fling him straight at the Barin.

One morning Petrov

Had set out to the forest

To pilfer some logs

(For the night would not serve him.

It seems, for his thieving,

He must go and do it

In broadest white daylight).

590

And there comes the carriage,

On springs, with the Barin !

“ ‘ From whence, little peasant,
That beautiful tree-trunk ?

From whence has it come ? ’

He knew, the old fellow,

From whence it had come.

Petrov stood there silent,

And what could he answer ?

He’d taken the tree

600

From the Barin’s own forest.

“ ‘ The Barin already

Is bursting with anger ;

He nags and reproaches,

He can't stop recalling
The rights of the nobles.
The rank of his Fathers,
He winds them all into
Petrov, like a corkscrew.

"The peasants are patient,
But even their patience
Must come to an end.
Petrov was out early,
Had eaten no breakfast,
Felt dizzy already,
And now with the words
Of the Barin all buzzing
Like flies in his ears—
Why, he couldn't keep steady,
He laughed in his face !

61

620

"Have done, you old scarecrow !"
He said to the Barin.
'You crazy old clown !'
His jaw once unmuzzled
He let enough words out
To stuff the Pomyéshchick
With Fathers and Grandfathers
Into the bargain.
The oaths of the lords
Are like stings of mosquitoes,
But those of the peasant
Like blows of the pick-axe.
The Barin's dumbfounded !
He'd safely encounter
A rain of small shot,
But he cannot face stones.
The ladies are with him,

630

THE DIE-HARD

145

They, too, are bewildered,
They run to the peasant
And try to restrain him.

640

“He bellows, ‘I’ll kill you !
For what are you swollen
With pride, you old dotard.
You scum of the pig-sty ?
Have done with your jabber !
You’ve lost your strong grip
On the soul of the peasant,
The last one you are.
By the will of the peasant
Because he is foolish
They treat you as master
To-day. But to-morrow
The ball will be ended ;
A good kick behind
We will give the Pomyéshchick.
And tail between legs
Send him back to his dwelling
To leave us in peace !’

650

“The Barin is gasping,
‘You rebel . . . you rebel !’
He trembles all over,
Half-dead he has fallen,
And lies on the earth !

660

“The end ! think the others,
The black-moustached footguards,
The beautiful ladies ;
But they are mistaken ;
It isn’t the end.

L

"An order : to summon
 The village together
 To witness the punishment
 Dealt to the rebel
 Before the Pomyéshchick. . . .
 The heirs and the ladies
 Come running in terror
 To Klím, to Petrov,
 And to me : ' Only save us ! '
 Their faces are pale,
 ' If the trick is discovered
 We're lost ! '

670

680

It is Klím's place
 To deal with the matter :
 He drinks with Petrov
 All day long, till the evening,
 Embracing him fondly.
 Together till midnight
 They pace round the village,
 At midnight start dinking
 Again till the morning.
 Petrov is as tipsy
 As ever man was,
 And like that he is brought
 To the Barin's large courtyard,
 And all in perfection !
 The Barin can't move
 From the balcony, thanks
 To his yesterday's shaking.
 And Klím is well pleased.

690

"He leads Petrov into
 The stable and sets him
 In front of a gallon
 Of vodka, and tells him :

700

‘Now, drink and start crying,
“Oh, oh, little Fathers !
Oh, oh, little Mothers !
Have mercy ! Have mercy !”’

“Petrov does his bidding ;
He howls, and the Barin.
Perched up on the balcony,
Listens in rapture.

710

He drinks in the sound
Like the loveliest music.
And who could help laughing
To hear him exclaiming,
‘Don’t spare him, the villain !
The im-pu-dent rascal !

Just teach him a lesson !’
Petrov yells aloud

Till the vodka is finished.
Of course in the end
He is perfectly helpless,

720

And four peasants carry him
Out of the stable.

His state is so sorry
That even the Barin
Has pity upon him,
And says to him sweetly,

‘Your own fault it is,
Little peasant, you know !”’

“You see what a kind heart
He has, the Pomyéshchick,”
Says Prov, and old Vlásuchka
Answers him quietly,

730

“A saying there is :

‘Praise the grass—in the haystack,
The lord—in his coffin.’

'Twere well if God took him.
Petrov is no longer
Alive. That same evening
He started up, raving,
At midnight the pope came,
And just as the day dawned
He died. He was buried,
A cross set above him,
And God alone knows
What he died of. It's certain
That we never touched him,
Nay, not with a finger,
Much less with a stick.

740

Yet sometimes the thought comes :
Perhaps if that accident
Never had happened
Petrov would be living.

751

You see, friends, the peasant
Was proud more than others,
He carried his head high,
And never had bent it,
And now of a sudden—
Lie down for the Barin !
Fall flat for his pleasure !
The thing went off well,
But Petrov had not wished it.
I think he was frightened
To anger the commune
By not giving in,
And the commune is foolish,
It soon will destroy you. . . .
The ladies were ready
To kiss the old peasant,
They brought fifty roubles
For him, and some dainties.

760

770

KLÍM, THE ELDER

149

'Twas Klímka, the scamp,
The unscrupulous sinner,
Who worked his undoing. . . .

“A servant is coming
To us from the Barin,
They've finished their lunch.
Perhaps they have sent him
To summon the Elder.
I'll go and look on
At the comedy there.”

780

II

KLÍM, THE ELDER

With him go the strangers,
And some of the women
And men follow after,
For mid-day has sounded.
Their rest-time it is,
So they gather together
To stare at the gentry,
To whisper and wonder.
They stand in a row
At a dutiful distance
Away from the Prince. . . .

10

At a long snowy table
Quite covered with bottles
And all kinds of dishes
Are sitting the gentry,
The old Prince presiding
In dignified state

770

At the head of the table ;
All white, dressed in white,
With his face shrunk awry, 20
His dissimilar eyes ;
In his button-hole fastened
A little white cross
(It's the cross of St. George,
Some one says in a whisper) :
And standing behind him,
Ipât, the domestic,
The faithful old servant,
In white tie and shirt-front
Is brushing the flies off. 30
Beside the Pomyeshchick
On each hand are sitting
The beautiful ladies :
The one with black tresses,
Her lips red as beetroots,
Each eye like an apple ;
The other, the fair-haired,
With yellow locks streaming.
(Oh, you yellow locks,
Like spun gold do you glisten
And glow, in the sunshine !)
Then perched on three high chairs
The three little Barins,
Each wearing his napkin
Tucked under his chin,
With the old nurse beside them,
And further the body
Of ancient retainers ;
And facing the Prince
At the foot of the table,
The black-moustached footguards 50
Are sitting together.

Behind each chair standing
 A young girl is serving,
 And women are waving
 The flies off with branches.
 The woolly white poodles
 Are under the table,
 The three little Barins
 Are teasing them slyly.

60

Before the Pomyéshchick,
 Bare-headed and humble,
 The Elder is standing.
 'Now tell me, how soon
 Will the mowing be finished?'
 The Barin says, talking
 And eating at once.

"It soon will be finished.
 Three days of the week
 Do we work for your Highness :
 A man with a horse,
 And a youth and a woman,
 And half an old woman
 From every allotment.
 To-day for this week
 Is the Barin's term finished."

70

"Tut-tut!" says the Barin,
 Like one who has noticed
 Some crafty intent
 On the part of another.
 "The Barin's term," say you?
 Now, what do you mean, pray?
 The eye which is bright
 He has fixed on the peasant.

80

The Elder is hanging
His head in confusion.

"Of course it must be
As your Highness may order.

In two or three days,
If the weather be gracious,

The hay of your Highness
Can surely be gathered.

That's so,—is it not ? "

(He turns his broad face round
And looks at the peasants.)

And then the sharp woman,

Klím's gossip, Orévna,

Makes answer for them :

"Yes, Klím, Son-of-Jacob,

The hay of the Barin

Is surely more precious

Than ours. We must tend it

As long as the weather lasts ;

Ours may come later."

"A woman she is,
But more clever than you,"

The Pomyéshchick says smiling.

And then of a sudden

Is shaken with laughter :

"Ha, ha ! Oh, you blockhead !

Ha, ha ! fool ! fool ! fool !

It's the 'Barin's term,' say you ?

Ha, ha ! fool, ha, ha !

The Barin's term, slave,

Is the whole of your life-time :

And you have forgotten

That I, by God's mercy,

By Tsar's ancient charter,
By birth and by merit,
Am your supreme master ! ” 120

The strangers remark here
That Vlásuchka gently
Slips down to the grass.

“ What's that for ? ” they ask him.
“ We may as well rest now ;
He's off. You can't stop him.
For since it was rumoured
That we should be given
Our freedom, the Barin
Takes care to remind us 130
That till the last hour
Of the world will the peasant
Be clenched in the grip
Of the nobles.” And really
An hour slips away
And the Prince is still speaking :
His tongue will not always
Obey him, he splutters
And hisses, falls over 140
His words, and his right eye
So shares his disquiet
That it trembles and twitches.
The left eye expands,
Grows as round as an owl's eye,
Revolves like a wheel.
The rights of his Fathers
Through ages respected,
His services, merits,
His name and possessions,
The Barin rehearses. 1

God's curse, the Tsar's anger,
 He hurls at the heads
 Of obstreperous peasants.
 And strictly gives order
 To sweep from the commune
 All senseless ideas,
 Bids the peasants remember
 That they are his slaves
 And must honour their master.

"Our Fathers," cried Klím,
 And his voice sounded strangely, 160
 It rose to a squeak
 As if all things within him
 Leapt up with a passionate
 Joy of a sudden
 At thought of the mighty
 And noble Pomyéshchicks.
 "And whom should we serve
 Save the Master we cherish?
 And whom should we honour?
 In whom should we hope?
 We feed but on sorrows,
 We bathe but in tear-drops,
 How can we rebel?

"Our tumble-down hovels,
 Our weak little bodies,
 Ourselves, we are yours,
 We belong to our Master.
 The seeds which we sow
 In the earth, and the harvest.
 The hair on our heads -
 All belongs to the Master.
 Our ancestors fallen
 To dust in their coffins,

Our feeble old parents
Who nod on the oven,
Our little ones lying
Asleep in their cradles
Are yours—are our Master's,
And we in our homes 190
Use our wills but as freely
As fish in a net."

The words of the Elder
Have pleased the Pomyéshchick,
The right eye is gazing
Benignantly at him,
The left has grown smaller
And peaceful again
Like the moon in the heavens.
He pours out a goblet 200
Of red foreign wine :
" Drink," he says to the peasant.
The rich wine is burning
Like blood in the sunshine ;
Klím drinks without protest.
Again he is speaking :

" Our Fathers," he says,
" By your mercy we live now
As though in the bosom
Of Christ. Let the peasant 210
But try to exist
Without grace from the Barin !"
(He sips at the goblet.)
" The whole world would perish
If not for the Barin's
Deep wisdom and learning.
If not for the peasant's
Most humble submission.

By birth, and God's holy
 Decree you are bidden
 To govern the stupid
 And ignorant peasant ;
 By God's holy will
 Is the peasant commanded
 To honour and cherish
 And work for his lord ! ”

. 20

And here the old servant,
 Ipát, who is standing
 Behind the Pomyéshchick
 And waving his branches,
 Begins to sob loudly,
 The tears streaming down
 O'er his withered old face :
 “ Let us pray that the Barin
 For many long years
 May be spared to his servants ! ”
 The simpleton blubbers,
 The loving old servant,
 And raising his hand,

230

Weak and trembling, he crosses
 Himself without ceasing.
 The black-moustached footguards
 Look sourly upon him
 With secret displeasure.
 But how can they help it ?
 So off come their hats
 And they cross themselves also.
 And then the old Prince
 And the wrinkled old dry-nurse
 Both sign themselves thrice,
 And the Elder does likewise.

45

He winks to the woman,
His sharp little gossip,
And straightway the women,
Who nearer and nearer
Have drawn to the table,
Begin most devoutly
To cross themselves too.
And one begins sobbing
In just such a manner 260
As had the old servant.
("That's right, now, start whining,
Old Widow Teréntevna,
Sill-y old noodle!")
Says Víasuchka, crossly.)

The red sun peeps slyly
At them from a cloud,
And the slow, dreamy music
Is heard from the river.

The ancient Pomyéshchick 270
Is moved, and the right eye
Is blinded with tears,
Till the golden-haired lady
Removes them and dries it;
She kisses the other eye
Heartily too.

"You see!" then remarks
The old man to his children,
The two stalwart sons
And the pretty young ladies; 280
"I wish that those villains,
Those Petersburg liars

Who say we are tyrants,
 Could only be here now
 To see and hear this ! ”

But then something happened
 Which checked of a sudden
 The speech of the Barin :
 A peasant who couldn't
 Control his amusement
 Gave vent to his laughter.

290

The Barin starts wildly,
 He clutches the table,
 He fixes his face
 In the sinner's direction ;
 The right eye is fierce,
 Like a lynx he is watching
 To dart on his prey,
 And the left eye is whirling.
 “ Go, find him ! ” he hisses,
 “ Go, fetch him ! the scoundrel ! ”

30

The Elder dives straight
 In the midst of the people ;
 He asks himself wildly,
 “ Now, what's to be done ? ”
 He makes for the edge
 Of the crowd, where are sitting
 The journeying strangers ;
 His voice is like honey :
 “ Come one of you forward ;
 You see, you are strangers,
 He wouldn't touch *you*.”

31

But they are not anxious
 To face the Pomyéshchick.

Although they would gladly
Have helped the poor peasants.
He's mad, the old Barin,
So what's to prevent him
From beating them too ?

" Well, you go, Román," 320
Say the two brothers Góobin,
" *You* love the Pomyéshchicks."

" I'd rather you went, though !"
And each is quite willing
To offer the other.
Then Klím looses patience ;
" Now, Vlásuchka, help us !
Do something to save us !
I'm sick of the thing !"

" Yes ! Nicely you lied there !" 330

" Oho !" says Klím sharply,
" What lies did I tell ?
And shan't we be choked
In the grip of the Barins
Until our last day
When we lie in our coffins ?
When we get to Hell, too,
Won't they be there waiting
To set us to work ?"

" What kind of a job 340
Would they find for us there, Klím ?"

" To stir up the fire
While they boil in the pots !"
The others laugh loudly.

160 THE LAST POMYÉSHCHICK

The sons of the Barin
Come hurrying to them ;
" How foolish you are, Klím !
Our father has sent us.
He's terribly angry
That you are so long,
And don't bring the offender."

350

" We can't bring him, Barin ;
A stranger he is,
From St. Petersburg province,
A very rich peasant ;
The devil has sent him
To us, for our sins !
He can't understand us,
And things here amuse him ;
He couldn't help laughing."

351

" Well, let him alone, then.
Cast lots for a culprit,
We'll pay him. Look here !"
He offers five roubles.
Oh, no. It won't tempt them.

" Well, run to the Barin.
And say that the fellow
Has hidden himself."

" But what when to-morrow comes ?
Have you forgotten
Petrov, how we punished
The innocent peasant ?"

352

" Then what's to be done ?"

“ Give me the five roubles !
You trust me, I'll save you ! ”
Exclaims the sharp woman,
The Elder's sly gossip.
She runs from the peasants
Lamenting and groaning,
And flings herself straight
At the feet of the Barin :

380

“ O red little sun !
O my Father, don't kill me !
I have but one child,
Oh, have pity upon him !
My poor boy is daft,
Without wits the Lord made him,
And sent him so into
The world. He is crazy.
Why, straight from the bath
He at once begins scratching ;
His drink he will try
To pour into his laputs
Instead of the jug.
And of work he knows nothing ;
He laughs, and that's all
He can do—so God made him !
Our poor little home,
'Tis small comfort he brings it ;
Our hut is in ruins,
Not seldom it happens
We've nothing to eat,
And that sets him laughing—
The poor crazy loon !
You may give him a farthing,
A crack on the skull,
And at one and the other

390

400

He'll laugh—so God made him!
 And what can one say?
 From a fool even sorrow
 Comes pouring in laughter."

The knowing young woman!
 She lies at the feet
 Of the Barin, and trembles.
 She squeals like a silly
 Young girl when you pinch her.
 She kisses his feet.

"Well . . . go. God be with you!
 The Barin says kindly,
 "I need not be angry
 At idiot laughter,
 I'll laugh at him too!"

"How good you are, Father,"
 The black-eyed young lady
 Says sweetly, and strokes
 The white head of the Barin.
 The black-moustached footguards
 At this put their word in:

"A fool cannot follow
 The words of his masters,
 Especially those
 Like the words of our father.
 So noble and clever."

And Klím—shameless rascal!—
 Is wiping his eyes
 On the end of his coat-tails,
 Is sniffing and whining;

"Our Fathers! Our Fathers!"

The sons of our Father !

They know how to punish,
But better they know
How to pardon and pity ! ”

440

The old man is cheerful
Again, and is asking

For light frothing wine,
And the corks begin popping
And shoot in the air

To fall down on the women,
Who fly from them, shrieking.

The Barin is laughing,
The ladies then laugh,

450

And at them laugh their husbands,
And next the old servant,

Ipát, begins laughing,
The wet-nurse, the dry-nurse,

And then the whole party
Laugh loudly together ;

The feast will be merry !
His daughters-in-law

At the old Prince's order
Are pouring out vodka

460

To give to the peasants,
Hand cakes to the youths,

To the girls some sweet syrup
The women drink also

A small glass of vodka.
The old Prince is drinking

And toasting the peasants ;
And slyly he pinches

The beautiful ladies.

470

“ That's right ! That will do him
More good than his physic,”



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ANSI and ISO TEST CHART No. 2



1.0



2.8



2.5



3.2



2.2

3.6

4.0



1.1



2.0



1.8



1.25



1.4



1.6



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Says Vlásuchka, watching.
 "He drinks by the glassful,
 Since long he's lost measure
 In revel, or wrath. . . ."

The music comes floating
 To them from the Volga,
 The girls now already
 Are dancing and singing,
 The old Prince is watching them.
 Snapping his fingers.

180

He wants to be nearer
 The girls, and he rises.
 His legs will not bear him,
 His two sons support him ;
 And standing between them
 He chuckles and whistles,
 And stamps with his feet
 To the time of the music ;
 The left eye begins
 On its own account working,
 It turns like a wheel.

490

"But why aren't you dancing?"
 He says to his sons,
 And the two pretty ladies.
 "Dance! Dance!" They can't help them-
 selves,

There they are dancing!
 He laughs at them gaily,
 He wishes to show them
 How things went in *his* time ;
 He's shaking and swaying
 Like one on the deck
 Of a ship in rough weather.

500

"Sing, Luiba!" he orders.
The golden-haired lady
Does not want to sing,
But the old man will have it.
The lady is singing
A song low and tender, 510
It sounds like the breeze
On a soft summer evening
In velvety grasses
Astray, like spring raindrops
That kiss the young leaves.
And it soothes the Pomyéshchick.
The feeble old man:
He is falling asleep now. . . .
And gently they carry him
Down to the water, 520
And into the boat,
And he lies there, still sleeping.
Above him stands, holding
A big green umbrella.
The faithful old servant,
His other hand guarding
The sleeping Pomyéshchick
From gnats and mosquitoes.
The oarsmen are silent.
The faint-sounding music 530
Can hardly be heard
As the boat moving gently
Glides on through the water. . . .

The peasants stand watching:
The bright yellow hair
Of the beautiful lady
Streams out in the breeze
Like a long golden banner. . . .

"I managed him finely,
The noble Pomyéshchick," 540
Said Klim to the peasants.
"Be God with you, Barin!
Go bragging and scolding,
Don't think for a moment
That we are now free
And your servants no longer.
But die as you lived,
The almighty Pomyéshchick,
To sound of our music,
To songs of your slaves ; 550
But only die quickly,
And leave the poor peasants
In peace. And now, brothers,
Come, praise me and thank me !
I've gladdened the commune.
I shook in my shoes there
Before the Pomyéshchick,
For fear I should trip
Or my tongue should betray me ;
And worse—I could hardly 560
Speak plain for my laughter !
That eye ! How it spins !
And you look at it, thinking :
'But whither, my friend,
Do you hurry so quickly ?
On some hasty errand
Of yours, or another's ?
Perhaps with a pass
From the Tsar—Little Father,
You carry a message 570
From him.' I was standing
And bursting with laughter !
Well, I am a drunken

And frivolous peasant,
The rats in my corn-loft
Are starving from hunger,
My hut is quite bare,
Yet I call God to witness
That I would not take
Such an office upon me
For ten hundred roubles
Unless I were certain
That he was the last,
That I bore with his bluster
To serve my own ends,
Of my own will and pleasure."

580

Old Vlásuchka sadly
And thoughtfully answers,
"How long, though, how long, though,
Have we—not we only
But all Russian peasants—
Endured the Pomyéshchicks?
And not for our pleasure,
For money or fun,
Not for two or three months,
But for life. What has changed, though?
Of what are we bragging?
For still we are peasants."

590

The peasants, half-tipsy,
Congratulate Klímka.
"Hurrah! Let us toss him!"
And now they are placing
Old Widow Teréntevna
Next to her bridegroom,
The little child Jóckoff,
Saluting them gaily.

600

They're eating and drinking
 What's left on the table.
 Then romping and jesting
 They stay till the evening,
 And only at nightfall
 Return to the village.
 And here they are met
 By some sobering tidings :
 The old Prince is dead.
 From the boat he was taken,
 They thought him asleep,
 But they found he was lifeless.
 The second stroke—while
 He was sleeping—had fallen !

610

620

The peasants are sobered,
 They look at each other,
 And silently cross themselves.
 Then they breathe deeply ;
 And never before
 Did the poor squalid village
 Called " Ignorant-Duffers,"
 Of Volost " Old-Dustmen,"
 Draw such an intense
 And unanimous breath. . . .
 Their pleasure, however,
 Was not very lasting,
 Because with the death
 Of the ancient Pomyéshchick,
 The sweet-sounding words
 Of his heirs and their bounties
 Ceased also. Not even
 A pick-me-up after
 The yesterday's feast
 Did they offer the peasants.

630

640

KLÍM, THE ELDER

169

And as to the hayfields
Till now is the law-suit
Proceeding between them.
The heirs and the peasants.
Old Vlásuchka was

By the peasants appointed
To plead in their name.

And he lives now in Moscow.
He went to St. Petersburg too,

But I don't think
That much can be done
For the cause of the peasants.

050

020

630

04

PART III

THE PEASANT WOMAN

PROLOGUE

“Not only to men
Must we go with our question,
We’ll ask of the women.”
The peasants decided.
They asked in the village
“Split-up,” but the people
Replied to them shortly,
“Not here will you find one.
But go to the village
‘Stripped-Naked’—a woman
Lives there who is happy. 10
She’s hardly a woman,
She’s more like a cow,
For a woman so healthy,
So smooth and so clever,
Could hardly be found.
You must seek in the village
Matróna Korchágin --
The people there call her
‘The Governor’s Lady.’” 20
The peasants considered
And went. . . .

Now already
The corn-stalks are rising
Like tall graceful columns,
With gilded heads nodding,
And whispering softly
In gentle low voices.
Oh, beautiful summer !
No time is so gorgeous,
So regal, so rich.

You full yellow cornfields,
To look at you now
One would never imagine
How sorely God's people
Had toiled to array you
Before you arose,
In the sight of the peasant,
And stood before him,
Like a glorious army
In front of a Tsar !
'Tis not by warm dew-drops
That you have been moistened.
The sweat of the peasant
Has fallen upon you.

The peasants are gladdened
At sight of the oats
And the rye and the barley,
But not by the wheat,
For it feeds but the chosen :
" We love you not, wheat !
But the rye and the barley
We love—they are kind,
They feed all men alike."

The flax, too, is growing
So sweetly and bravely :
“ Ai ! you little mit !
You are caught and entangled
A poor little lark
In the flax has been captured ; 60
It struggles for freedom.
Pakhóm picks it up.
He kisses it tenderly :
“ Fly, little birdie ! ” . . .
The lark flies away
To the blue heights of Heaven ;
The kind-hearted peasants
Gaze lovingly upwards
To see it rejoice
In the freedom above. . . .
The peas have come on, too ;
Like locusts, the peasants
Attack them and eat them.
They’re like a plump maiden—
The peas—for whoever
Goes by must needs pinch them.
Now peas are being carried
In old hands, in young hands.
They’re spreading abroad
Over seventy high-roads. 80
The vegetables—how
They’re flourishing also !
Each toddler is clasping
A radish or carrot,
And many are cracking
The seeds of the sunflower.
The beetroots are dotted
Like little red slippers
All over the earth.

Our peasants are walking,
Now faster—now slower.

At last they have reached it
The village 'Stripped-Naked.'

It's not much to look at ;
Each hut is propped up

Like a beggar on crutches ;
The thatch from the roofs

Has made food for the cattle ;
The huts are like feeble

Old skeletons standing,
Like desolate rooks' nests

When young birds forsake them.
When wild Autumn winds

Have dismantled the birch-trees.
The people are all

In the fields ; they are working.
Behind the poor village

A manor is standing ;
It's built on the slope

Of a hill, and the peasants
Are making towards it

To look at it close.

The house is gigantic,

The courtyard is huge,

There's a pond in it too ;

A watch-tower arises

From over the house,

With a gallery round it,

A flagstaff upon it.

They meet with a lackey

Near one of the gates :

He seems to be wearing

A strange kind of mantle :
" Well, what are you up to ? "
He says to the friends,
" The Pomyéshchick's abroad now,
The manager's dying."

He shows them his back,
And they all begin laughing :

A tiger is clutching
The edge of his shoulder 130

" Heh ! here's a fine joke
They are hotly discussing

What kind of a mantle

The lackey is wearing,

Till clever Pakhóm

Has got hold of the riddle.

" The cunning old rascal,

He's stolen a carpet,

And cut in the middle 140

A hole for his head ! "

Like weak straddling beetles
Shut up to frozen

In cold empty huts

By the pitiless peasants.

The servants are crawling

All over the courtyard.

Their master long since

Has forgotten about them,

And left them to live 150

As they can. They are hungry.

All old and decrepit,

And dressed in all manners.

They look like a crowd

In a gipsy encampment.

And some are now dragging

A net through the pond :

“ God come to your help !

Have you caught something, brothers ? ”

“ One carp—nothing more ;

160

There used once to be many,

But now we have come

To the end of the feast ! ”

“ Do try to get five ! ”

Says a pale, pregnant woman,

Who's fervently blowing

A fire near the pond.

“ And what are those pretty

Carved poles you are burning ?

They're balcony railings,

170

I think, are they not ? ”

“ Yes, balcony railings.”

“ See here. They're like tinder ;
Don't blow on them, Mother !

I bet they'll burn faster
Than you find the victuals
To cook in the pot ! ”

“ I'm waiting and waiting,
And Mityenka sickens

Because of the musty
Old bread that I give him.

180

But what can I do ?
This life—it is bitter ! ”

She fondles the head
Of a half-naked baby

Who sits by her side

PROLOGUE

177

In a little brass basin,
A button-nosed mite.

"The boy will take cold there,
The basin will chill him," 190

Says Prov; and he wishes
To lift the child up,
But it screams at him, angry.
"No, no! Don't you touch him."

The mother says quickly,
"Why, can you not see
That's his carriage he's driving?
Drive on, little carriage!

Gee-up, little horses!
You see how he drives!" 200

The peasants each moment
Observe some new marvel;
And soon they have noticed
A strange kind of labour
Proceeding around them:
One man, it appears,
To the door has got fastened;
He's toiling away

To unscrew the brass handles.
His hands are so weak 210

He can scarcely control them.
Another is hugging

Some tiles: "See, Yegórshka,
I've dug quite a heap out!"

Some children are shaking
An apple-tree yonder:

"You see, little Uncles,

There aren't many left,
Though the tree was quite heavy."

"But why do you want them? 220
They're quite hard and green."
"We're thankful to get them!"

The peasants examine
The park for a long time;
Such wonders are seen here,
Such cunning inventions:
In one place a mountain
Is raised; in another
A ravine yawns deep!
A lake has been made too; 230
Perhaps at one time
There were swans on the water?
The summer-house has some
Inscriptions upon it,
Demyán begins spelling
Them out very slowly.
A grey-haired domestic
Is watching the peasants;
He sees they have very
Inquisitive natures, 240
And presently slowly
Goes hobbling towards them,
And holding a book.
He says, "Will you buy it?"
Demyán is a peasant
Acquainted with letters,
He tries for some time
But he can't read a word.

"Just sit down yourself
On that seat near the linden, 250
And read the book leisurely
Like a Pomyéshchick!"

“ You think you are clever,”
The grey-headed servant
Retorts with resentment,
“ Yet books which are learned
Are wasted upon you.

You read but the labels
On public-house windows,
And that which is written
On every odd corner :
“ Most strictly forbidden.” ”

The pathways are filthy,
The graceful stone ladies
Bereft of their noses.

“ The fruit and the berries,
The geese and the swans
Which were once on the water,
The thieving old rascals
Have stuffed in their maws.

Like church without pastor,
Like fields without peasants,
Are all these fine gardens
Without a Pomyéshchick.”

The peasants remark.
For long the Pomyéshchick
Has gathered his treasures,
When all of a sudden. . . .

(The six peasants laugh,
But the seventh is silent.
He hangs down his head.)

A song bursts upon them !
A voice is resounding
Like blasts of a trumpet.
The heads of the peasants
Are eagerly lifted,

They gaze at the tower.
 On the balcony round it
 A man is now standing :
 He wears a pope's cassock ; 290
 He sings . . . on the balmy
 Soft air of the evening,
 The bass, like a huge
 Silver bell, is vibrating.
 And throbbing it enters
 The hearts of the peasants.
 The words are not Russian,
 But some foreign language,
 But, like Russian songs,
 It is full of great sorrow. 300
 Of passionate grief,
 Unending, unfathomed :
 It wails and laments,
 It is bitterly sobbing. . . .

" Pray tell us, good woman,
 What man is that singing ? "
 Román asks the woman
 Now feeding her baby
 With steaming *ukhá*.¹

" A singer, my brothers, 310
 A born Little Russian,
 The Barin once brought him
 Away from his home,
 With a promise to send him
 To Italy later.
 But long the *Pomyéshchick*
 Has been in strange parts
 And forgotten his promise ;
 And now the poor fellow

¹ *Jkhá*—fish soup.

PROLOGUE

181

Would be but too glad
To get back to his village.
There's nothing to do here,
He hasn't a farthing,
There's nothing before him
And nothing behind him
Excepting his voice.

320

You have not really heard it ;
You will if you stay here
Till sunrise to-morrow :
Some three versts away

330

There is living a deacon,
And he has a voice too.

They greet one another :
Each morning at sunrise

Will our little singer
Climb up to the watch-tower,

And call to the other,
' Good-morrow to Father
Ipát, and how fares he ? '

(The windows all shake

340

At the sound.)

From the distance

The deacon will answer,
' Good-morrow, good-morrow,
To our little sweet-throat !

I go to drink vodka.

I'm going . . . I'm going . . . '

The voice on the air

Will hang quivering around us
For more than an hour.

350

Like the neigh of a stallion."

The cattle are now

Coming home, and the evening

Is filled with the fragrance
 Of milk and the woman,
 The mother of Mityenka,
 Sighs ; she is thinking,
 " If only one cow
 Would turn into the courtyard ! "
 But hark ! In the distance
 Some voices in chorus !
 " Good-bye, you poor mourners,
 May God send you comfort !
 The people are coming,
 We're going to meet them. "

360

The peasants are filled
 With relief ; because after
 The whining old servants
 The people who meet them
 Returning from work
 In the fields seem such healthy
 And beautiful people.
 The men and the women
 And pretty young girls
 Are all singing together.

370

" Good health to you ! Which is
 Among you the woman
 Matróna Korchágin ? "
 The peasants demand.

" And what do you want
 With Matróna Korchágin ? "

38

The woman Matróna
 Is tall, finely moulded,
 Majestic in bearing,
 And strikingly handsome.
 Of thirty-eight years

She appears, and her black hair
Is mingled with grey.

Her complexion is swarthy,
Her eyes large and dark 390
And severe, with rich lashes.

A white shirt, and short
Sarafán¹ she is wearing,
She walks with a hay-fork
Slung over her shoulder.

"Well, what do you want
With Matróna Korchágin?"
The peasants are silent;
They wait till the others
Have gone in advance, 400
And then, bowing, they answer:

"We come from afar,
And a trouble torments us,
A trouble so great
That for it we've forsaken
Our homes and our work,
And our appetites fail.
We're orthodox peasants,
From District 'Most Wretched,'
From 'Destitute Parish,' 410

From neighbouring hamlets
'Patched,' 'Parefoot,' and 'Shabby,'
'Bleak,' 'Burnt-Out,' and 'Hungry,'
And 'Harvestless,' too.
We met in the roadway
And argued about
Who is happy in Russia.
Luká said, 'The pope,'

¹ A national loose sleeveless dress worn with a separate shirt or blouse.

And Demyán, 'The Pomyéshchick,'

And Prov said, 'The Tsar,' 420

And Román, 'The official.'

'The round-bellied merchant.'

Said both brothers Goóbin,

Mitródor and Ívan.

Pakhóm said, 'His Highness,

The Tsar's Chief Adviser.'

Like bulls are the peasants :

Once folly is in them

You cannot dislodge it

Although you should beat them 430

With stout wooden cudgels,

They stick to their folly

And nothing will move them.

We argued and quarrelled,

While quarrelling fought,

And while fighting decided

That never again

Would we turn our steps homewards

To kiss wives and children.

To see the old people,

Until we have found 440

The reply to our question,

Of who can in Russia

Be happy and free ?

We've questioned the pope.

We've asked the Pomyéshchick,

And now we ask you.

We'll seek the official.

The Minister, merchant,

We even will go

To the Tsar Little Father, 450

Though whether he'll see us

We cannot be sure.

PROLOGUE

185

But rumour has told us
That *you're* free and happy.
Then say, in God's name,
If the rumour be true."

Matróna Korchágin

Does not seem astonished,
But only a sad look
Creeps into her eyes,
And her face becomes thoughtful.

160

"Your errand is surely
A foolish one, brothers,"
She says to the peasants,
"For this is the season
Of work, and no peasant
For chatter has time."

"Till now on our journey
Throughout half the Empire
We've met no denial,"
The peasants protest.

470

"But look for yourselves, now,
The corn-ears are bursting.
We've not enough hands."

"And we? What are we for?
Just give us some sickles,
And see if we don't
Get some work done to-morrow!"
The peasants reply.

180

Matróna sees clearly
Enough that this offer
Must not be rejected;

120

130

ds

140

450

"Agreed," she said, smiling,
"To such lusty fellows
As you, we may well look
For ten sheaves apiece."

"You give us your promise
To open your heart to us?"

"I will hide nothing."

490

Matróna Korchágin

Now enters her cottage,
And while she is working
Within it, the peasants
Discover a very
Nice spot just behind it,
And sit themselves down.

There's a barn close beside them
And two immense haystacks,
A flax-field around them;
And lying just near them
A fine plot of turnips,
And spreading above them
A wonderful oak-tree,
A king among oaks.

500

They're sitting beneath it,
And now they're producing
The magic white napkin:

"Heh, napkin enchanted,
Give food to the peasants!"
The napkin unfolds,

510

Two hands have come floating
From no one sees where,
Place a pailful of vodka,
A large pile of bread

THE WEDDING

187

On the magic white napkin,
And dwindle away.
The two brothers Goóbin
Are chuckling together,
For they have just pilfered
A very big horse-radish
Out of the garden
It's really a monster !

520

The skies are dark blue now,
The bright stars are twinkling.
The moon has arisen
And sails high above them ;
The woman Matróna
Comes out of the cottage
To tell them her tale.

530

CHAPTER I

THE WEDDING

" My girlhood was happy,
For we were a thrifty
And diligent household ;
And I, the young maiden,
With Father and Mother
Knew nothing but joy.
My father got up
And went out before sunrise,
He woke me with kisses
And tender caresses ;
My brother, while dressing,
Would sing little verses :

10

' Get up, little Sister,
Get up, little Sister,
In no little beds now
Are people delaying,
In all little churches
The peasants are praying,
Get up, now, get up,
It is time, little Sister.
The shepherd has gone
To the field with the sheep,
And no little maidens
Are lying asleep,
They've gone to pick raspberries,
Merrily singing.
The sound of the axe
In the forest is ringing.'

20

' And then my dear mother,
When she had done scouring
The pots and the pans,
When the hut was put tidy,
The bread in the oven,
Would steal to my bedside,
And cover me softly
And whisper to me :

30

' Sleep on, little dove,
Gather strength—you will need it—
You will not stay always
With Father and Mother,
And when you will leave them
To live among strangers
Not long will you sleep.
You'll slave till past midnight,
And rise before daybreak ;

40

THE WEDDING

189

You'll always be weary.
 They'll give you a basket
 And throw at the bottom
 A crust. You will chew it,
 My poor little dove,
 And start working again. . . .

50

“But, brothers, I did not
 Spend much time in sleeping ;
 And when I was five
 On the day of St. Simon,
 I mounted a horse
 With the help of my father,
 And then was no longer
 A child. And at six years
 I carried my father
 His breakfast already,
 And tended the ducks,
 And at night brought the cow home,
 And next—took my rake,
 And was off to the hayfields !
 And so by degrees
 I became a great worker,
 And yet best of all
 I loved singing and dancing ;
 The whole day I worked
 In the fields, and at nightfall
 Returned to the cottage
 All covered with grime.
 But what's the hot bath for ?
 And thanks to the bath
 And boughs of the birch-tree,
 And icy spring water,
 Again I was clean
 And refreshed, and was ready

60

70

To take out my spinning-wheel,
And with companions
To sing half the night.

80

“ I never ran after
The youths, and the forward
I checked very sharply.
To those who were gentle
And shy, I would whisper :
‘ My cheeks will grow hot,
And sharp eyes has my mother ;
Be wise, now, and leave me
Alone ’—and they left me.

90

“ No matter how clever
I was to avoid them,
The one came at last
I was destined to wed ;
And he—to my bitter
Regret—was a stranger :
Young Phílíp Korchágin,
A builder of ovens.
He came from St. Petersburg.
Oh, how my mother
Did weep : ‘ Like a fish
In the ocean, my daughter,
You’ll plunge and be lost ;
Like a nightingale, straying
Away from its nest,
We shall lose you, my daughter !
The walls of the stranger
Are not built of sugar.
Are not spread with honey.
Their dwellings are chilly
And garnished with hunger ;

100

110

80 The cold winds will nip you,
The black rooks will scold you,
The savage dogs bite you,
The strangers despise you.'

"But Father sat talking
And drinking till late
With the 'swat.'¹ I was frightened,
I slept not all night. . . . 120

90 "Oh, youth, pray you, tell me,
Now what can you find
In the maiden to please you?
And where have you seen her?
Perhaps in the sledges
With merry young friends
Flying down from the mountain?

Then you were mistaken,
O son of your father,
It was but the frost 130

And the speed and the laughter
That brought the bright tints
To the cheeks of the maiden.

100 Perhaps at some feast
In the home of a neighbour
You saw her rejoicing
And clad in bright colours?
But then she was plump
From her rest in the winter:

Her rosy face bloomed 140
Like the scarlet-hued poppy;

But wait!—have you been
To the hut of her father

110 And seen her at work
Beating flax in the barn?

¹ The marriage agent.

Ah, what shall I do ?

I will take brother falcon
And send him to town :

‘ Fly to town, brother falcon,
And bring me some cloth

150

And six colours of worsted,
And tassels of blue.

I will make a fine curtain,
Embroider each corner

With Tsar and Tsaritsa,
With Moscow and Kiev,

And Constantinople,
And set the great sun

Shining bright in the middle.
And this I will hang

160

In the front of my window :
Perhaps you will see it,

And, struck by its beauty,
Will stand and admire it,

And will not remember
To seek for the maiden.’ . . .

“ And so till the morning
I lay with such thoughts.

‘ Now, leave me, young fellow.’
I said to the youth

170

When he came in the evening ;
‘ I will not be foolish

Enough to abandon
My freedom in order

To enter your service.
God sees me—I will not
Depart from my home !’

“ ‘ Do come,’ said young Philip,
‘ So far have I travelled

THE WEDDING

193

To fetch you. Don't fear me—

180

I will not ill-treat you.'

I begged him to leave me,

I wept and lamented ;

But nevertheless

I was still a young maiden :

I did not forget

Sidelong glances to cast

At the youth who thus wooed me.

And Philip was handsome,

Was rosy and lusty,

190

Was strong and broad-shouldered.

With fair curling hair,

With a voice low and tender. . . .

Ah, well . . . I was won. . . .

“ Come here, pretty fellow,

And stand up against me,

Look deep in my eyes—

They are clear eyes and truthful ;

Look well at my rosy

Young face, and bethink you :

200

Will you not regret it,

Won't my heart be broken,

And shall I not weep

Day and night if I trust you

And go with you, leaving

My parents for ever ?

“ Don't fear, little pigeon,

We shall not regret it,'

Said Philip, but still

I was timid and doubtful.

210

‘ Do go,’ murmured I, and he,

‘ When you come with me.’

Of course I was fairer
And sweeter and dearer
Than any that lived,
And his arms were about me. . . .
Then all of a sudden

I made a sharp effort
To wrench myself free. 219

'How now? What's the matter?
You're strong, little pigeon!'

Said Philip astonished.
But still held me tight.

'Ah, Philip, if you had
Not held me so firmly
You would not have won me;
I did it to try you.

To measure your strength;
You were strong, and it pleased me.
We must have been happy 230

In those fleeting moments
When softly we whispered
And argued together;
I think that we never
Were happy again. . . .

"How well I remember. . . .
The night was like this night,
Was starlit and silent . . .
Was dreamy and tender
Like this. . . ." 240

And the woman,
Matróna, sighed deeply,
And softly began
Leaning back on the haystack—
To sing to herself
With her thoughts in the past:

“ Tell me, young merchant, pray,
Why do you love me so
Poor peasant's daughter ?
I am not clad in gold,
I am not hung with pearls,
Not decked with silver.”

250

“ Silver your chastity,
Golden your beauty shines.
O my beloved,
White pearls are falling now
Out of your weeping eyes,
Falling like tear-drops.”

“ My father gave orders
To bring forth the wine-cups,
To set them all out
On the solid oak table.

260

My dear mother blessed me :
‘ Go, serve them, my daughter,
Bow low to the strangers.’

I bowed for the first time,
My knees shook and trembled :
I bowed for the second—

My face had turned white ;
And then for the third time

270

I bowed, and forever
The freedom of girlhood
Rolled down from my head. . . .”

“ Ah, that means a wedding,”
Cry both brothers Goóbin.

“ Let's drink to the health
Of the happy young pair ! ”

“ Well said ! We'll begin
With the bride,” say the others.

"Will you drink some vodka,
Matróna Korchágin?"

280

"An old woman, brothers,
And not drink some vodka?"

CHAPTER II

A SONG

Stand before your judge—
And your legs will quake!
Stand before the priest
On your wedding-day, -
How your head will ache!
How your head will ache!
You will call to mind
Songs of long ago,
Songs of gloom and woe:
Telling how the guests
Crowd into the yard,
Run to see the bride
Whom the husband brings
Homeward at his side.
How his parents both
Fling themselves on her;
How his brothers soon
Call her "wasteful one";
How his sisters next
Call her "giddy one";
How his father growls,
"Greedy little bear!"
How his mother snarls,
"Cannibal!" at her.

10

20

She is "slovenly"
And "disorderly,"
She's a "wicked one" !

"All that's in the song
Happened now to me.
Do you know the song ?
Have you heard it sung ? "

"Yes, we know it well ;
Gossip, you begin,
We will all join in."

Matróna

So sleepy, so weary
I am, and my heavy head
Clings to the pillow.
But out in the passage
My Father-in-law
Begins stamping and swearing. 40

Peasants in Chorus

Stamping and swearing !
Stamping and swearing !
He won't let the poor woman
Rest for a moment.
Up, up, up, lazy-head !
Up, up, up, lie-abed !
Lazy-head !
Lie-abed !
Slut !

Matróna

So sleepy, so weary
I am, and my heavy head
Clings to the pillow ;

But out in the passage
My Mother-in-law
Began scolding and nagging.

Peasants in Chorus

Scolding and nagging !
Scolding and nagging !
She won't let the poor woman
Rest for a moment.
Up, up, up, lazy-head !
Up, up, up, lie-abed !
Lazy-head !
Lie-abed !
Shut !

60

“ A quarrelsome household
It was—that of Philip's
To which I belonged now ;
And I from my girlhood
Stepped straight into Hell.
My husband departed
To work in the city,
And leaving, advised me
To work and be silent,
To yield and be patient :
‘ Don't splash the red iron
With cold water—it hisses ! ’
With father and mother
And sisters-in-law he
Now left me alone ;
Not a soul was among them
To love or to shield me,
But many to scold.
One sister-in-law—
It was Martha, the eldest,—

70

Soon set me to work
Like a slave for her pleasure.
And Father-in-law too
One had to look after,
Or else all his clothes
To redeem from the tavern. 60
In all that one did
There was need to be careful.
Or Mother-in-law's
Superstitions were troubled
(One never could please her).
Well, some superstitions
Of course may be right ;
But they're most of them evil.
And one day it happened
That Mother-in-law 100
Murmured low to her husband
That corn which is stolen
Grows faster and better.
So Father-in-law
Stole away after midnight.
It chanced he was caught,
And at daybreak next morning
Brought back and flung down
Like a log in the stable.

But I acted always 110
As Philip had told me :
I worked, with the anger
Hid deep in my bosom,
And never a murmur
Allowed to escape me.
And then with the winter
Came Philip, and brought me
A pretty silk scarf ;

And one feast-day he took me
To drive in the sledges ;
And quickly my sorrows
Were lost and forgotten :
I sang as in old days
At home, with my father.
For I and my husband
Were both of an age,
And were happy together
When only they left us
Alone, but remember
A husband like Philip
Not often is found."

120

130

" Do you mean to say
That he never once beat you ? "

Matróna was plainly
Confused by the question ;
" Once, only, he beat me,"
She said, very low.

" And why ? " asked the peasants.

" Well, you know yourselves, friends,
How quarrels arise
In the homes of the peasants.
A young married sister
Of Philip's one day
Came to visit her parents.
She found she had holes
In her boots, and it vexed her.
Then Philip said, ' Wife,
Fetch some boots for my sister.'
And I did not answer
At once ; I was lifting

140

150

A large wooden tub,
So, of course, couldn't speak.
But Philip was angry
With me, and he waited
Until I had hoisted
The tub to the oven,
Then struck me a blow
With his fist, on my temple.

... We're glad that you came,
But you see that you'd better
Keep out of the way,' 160
Said the other young sister
To her that was married.

"Again Philip struck me !
... It's long since I've seen you.
My dearly-loved daughter,
But could I have known
How the baggage would treat you . . . !'
Whined Mother-in-law.

"And again Philip struck me ! 170

"Well, that is the story.
'Tis surely not fitting
For wives to sit counting
The blows of their husbands.
But then I had promised
To keep nothing back."

"Ah, well, with these women
The poisonous serpents !--
A corpse would awaken
And snatch up a horsewhip," 180
The peasants say, smiling.

Matróna said nothing.
 The peasants, in order
 To keep the occasion
 In manner befitting,
 Are filling the glasses;
 And now they are singing
 In voices of thunder
 A rollicking chorus.
 Of husbands' relations,
 And wielding the knout.

19

* * *

“Cruel hated husband,
 Hark! he is coming!
 Holding the knout. . . .

Chorus

“Hear the lash whistle!
 See the blood spurt!
 Ai, leli, leli!
 See the blood spurt!

* * *

“Run to his father!
 Bowing before him—
 ‘Save me!’ I beg him;
 ‘Stop my fierce husband
 Venomous serpent!’
 Father-in-law says,
 ‘Beat her more soundly!
 Draw the blood freely!’

20

Chorus

“Hear the lash whistle!
 See the blood spurt!
 Ai, leli, leli!
 See the blood spurt!

21

* * *

A SONG

203

Quick—to his mother !
 Bowing before her
 ' Save me ! ' I beg her ;
 ' Stop my cruel husband !
 Venomous serpent ! '
 Mother-in-law says,
 ' Beat her more soundly,
 Draw the blood freely ! '

Chorus

"Hear the lash whistle !
 See the blood spurt !
 Ai, leli, leli !
 See the blood spurt !"

“ On Lady-day Philép
Went back to the city ;
A little while later
Our baby was born.
Like a bright-coloured picture
Was he—little Djóma ;
The sunbeams had given
Their radiance to him,
The pure snow its whiteness ;
The poppies had painted
His lips ; by the sable
His brow had been pencilled ;
The falcon had fashioned
His eyes, and had lent them
Their wonderful brightness.
At sight of his first
Angel smile, all the anger
And bitterness nursed
In my bosom was melted ;
It vanished away

Like the snow on the meadows
 At sight of the smiling
 Spring sun. And not longer
 I worried and fretted ;
 I worked, and in silence
 I let them upbraid.
 But soon after that

A misfortune befell me :
 The manager by
 The Pomyëshchick appointed,
 Called Sitnikov, hotly
 Began to pursue me.
 ' My lovely Tsaritsa !

250

' My rosy-ripe berry !'
 Said he ; and I answered,
 ' Be off, shameless rascal !

Remember, the berry
 Is not in *your* forest !'

260

I stayed from the field-work,
 And hid in the cottage ;
 He very soon found me.

I hid in the corn-loft,
 But Mother-in-law

Dragged me out to the courtyard ;
 ' Now don't play with fire, girl !'

She said. I besought her
 To send him away,

But she answered me roughly, 270
 ' And do you want Philip
 To serve as a soldier ?'

I ran to Savyéli,
 The grandfather, begging
 His aid and advice.

" I haven't yet told you
 A word of Savyéli,

SAVYÉLI

205

The only one living
Of Philip's relations
Who pitied and loved me. 280
Say, friends, shall I tell you
About him as well ? ”

250 “ Yes, tell us his tale.
And we'll each throw a couple
Of sheaves in to-morrow.
Above what we promised.”

“ Well, well,” says Matrona,
“ And 'twould be a pity
To give old Savyéli
No place in the story ; 290
For he was a happy one,
Too—the old man. . . .”

CHAPTER III

SAVYÉLI

d : “ A mane grey and bushy
Which covered his shoulders.
A huge grizzled beard
Which had not seen the scissors
270 For twenty odd years,
Made Savyéli resemble
A shaggy old bear,
Especially when he
Came out of the forest,
So broad and bent double. 10
The grandfather's shoulders

Were bowed very low,
And at first I was frightened
Whenever he entered
The tiny low cottage :

I thought that were he
To stand straight of a sudden
He'd knock a great hole
With his head in the ceiling.

But Grandfather could not
Stand straight, and they told me
That he was a hundred.

He lived all alone
In his own little cottage,
And never permitted
The others to enter ;

He couldn't abide them.
Of course they were angry
And often abused him.
His own son would shout at him.

' Branded one ! Convict !'
But this did not anger
Savyéli, he only
Would go to his cottage

Without making answer.
And, crossing himself,
Begin reading the scriptures :
Then suddenly cry

In a voice loud and joyful,
' Though branded—no slave !'
When too much they annoyed him,
He sometimes would say to them :

' Look, the swat's¹ coming !'
The unmarried daughter
Would fly to the window ;

¹ The marriage agent.

Instead of the swat there
A beggar she'd find !
And one day he silvered
A common brass farthing,
And left it to lie 50
On the floor ; and then straightway
Did Father-in-law run
In joy to the tavern,—
He came back, not tipsy,
But beaten half-dead !
At supper that night
We were all very silent,
And Father-in-law had
A cut on his eyebrow,
But Grandfather's face 60
Wore a smile like a rainbow !

“ Savyéli would gather
The berries and mushrooms
From spring till late autumn,
And snare the wild rabbits ;
Throughout the long winter
He lay on the oven
And talked to himself.
He had favourite sayings :
He used to lie thinking 70
For whole hours together,
And once in an hour
You would hear him exclaiming :

“ ‘ Destroyed . . . and subjected ! ’
Or, ‘ Ai, you toy heroes !
You're fit but for battles
With old men and women ! ’

“ Be patient . . . and perish,
Impatient . . . and perish ! ”

“ Eh, you Russian peasant,
You want, you strong man,
The whole of your lifetime
You're flogged, yet you dare not
Take refuge in death,
For Hell's torments await you ! ”

80

“ At last the Korójins ¹
Awoke, and they paid him,
They paid him, they paid him,
They paid the whole debt ! ”
And many such sayings
He had,—I forget them.
When Father-in-law grew
Too noisy I always
Would run to Savyéli,
And we two, together,
Would fasten the door.
Then I began working,
While Djómushka climbed
To the grandfather's shoulder,
And sat there, and looked
Like a bright little apple
That hung on a hoary
Old tree. Once I asked him :

90

100

“ And why do they call you
A convict, Savyéli ? ”

“ I was once a convict,”
Said he.

¹ Inhabitants of the village Korojin.

“ ‘ You, Savyéli ! ’

“ ‘ Yes I, little Grandchild,
Yes. I have been branded. 110
I buried a German
Alive—Christian Vogel.’

“ ‘ You’re joking. Savyéli ! ’

“ ‘ Oh no, I’m not joking.
I mean it.’ he said,
And he told me the story.

“ ‘ The peasants in old days
Were serfs as they now are,
But our race had, somehow,
Not seen its Pomyéshchick ; 120
No manager knew we,
No pert German agent.
And barschin we gave not,
And taxes we paid not
Except when it pleased us,—
Perhaps once in three years
Our taxes we’d pay.’

“ ‘ But why, little Grandad ? ’

“ ‘ The times were so blessed. —
And folk had a saying 130
That our little village
Was sought by the devil
For more than three years,
But he never could find it.
Great forests a thousand
Years old lay about us ;

And treacherous marshes
And bogs spread around us :
No horseman, and few men
On foot ever reached us. 14
It happened that once
By some chance, our Pomyéshechik,
Shaláshnikov, wanted
To pay us a visit.
High placed in the army
Was he : and he started
With soldiers to find us.
They soon got bewildered
And lost in the forest,
And had to turn back : 15
Why, the Zemsky policeman
Would only come once
In a year ! They were good times !
In these days the Barin
Lives under your window ;
The roadways go spreading
Around, like white napkins---
The devil destroy them !
We only were troubled
By bears, and the bears too
Were easily managed.
Why, I was a worse foe
By far than old Mishka,
When armed with a dagger
And bear-spear. I wandered
In wild, secret woodpaths,
And shouted, "*My forest !*"
And once, only once,
I was frightened by something :
I stepped on a huge 17
Female bear that was lying

Asleep in her den
In the heart of the forest.
She flung herself at me,
And straight on my bear-spear
Was fixed. Like a fowl
On the spit she hung twisting
An hour before death.
It was then that my spine snapped.
It often was painful 180
When I was a young man ;
But now I am old.
It is fixed and bent double.
Now, do I not look like
A hook, little Grandchild ?

... But finish the story.
You lived and were not much
Afflicted. What further ?

... At last our Pomyéshchick
Invented a new game : 190
He sent us an order.
"Appear !" We appeared not.
Instead, we lay low
In our dens, hardly breathing.
A terrible drought
Had descended that summer.
The bogs were all dry ;
So he sent a policeman,
Who managed to reach us,
To gather our taxes, 200
In honey and fish ;
A second time came he.
We gave him some bear-skins ;
And when for the third time

He came, we gave nothing,—

We said we had nothing.

We put on our laputs,

We put our old caps on,

Our oldest old coats,

And we went to Korójin

(For there was our master now,

Stationed with soldiers).

"Your taxes!" "We have none,

We cannot pay taxes,

The corn has not grown.

And the fish have escaped us."

"Your taxes!" "We have none."

He waited no longer;

"Hey! Give them the first round!"

He said, and they flogged us.

"Our pockets were not

Very easily opened;

Shaláshnikov, though, was

A master at flogging.

Our tongues became parched,

And our brains were set whirling,

And still he continued.

He flogged lot with birch-rods,

With whips or with sticks,

But with knouts made for giants.

At last we could stand it

No longer; we shouted,

"Enough! Let us breathe!"

We unwound our foot-rags

And took out our money,

And brought to the Barin

A ragged old bonnet

With roubles half filled

“ The Barin grew calm,
He was pleased with the money ;
He gave us a glass each
Of strong, bitter brandy,
And drank some himself
With the vanquished Korójins,
And gaily clinked glasses.
“ It’s well that ‘you yielded,’
Said he, “ For I swear
I was fully decided
To strip off the last shred
Of skins from your bodies
And use it for making
A drum for my soldiers !
Ha, ha ! Ha, ha, ha ! ”
(He was pleased with the notion.)
“ A fine drum indeed ! ”

“ · In silence we left ;
But two stalwart old peasants
Were chuckling together ;
They’d two hundred roubles
In notes, the old rascals !
Safe hidden away
In the end of their coat-tails.
They both had been yelling,
“ We’re beggars ! We’re beggars ! ”
So carried them home.
“ Well, well, you may cackle ! ”
I thought to myself,
“ But the next time, be certain,
You won’t laugh at me ! ”
The others were also
Ashamed of their weakness,
And so by the ikons

We swore all together
That next time we rather
Would die of the beating
Than feebly give way.
It seems the Pomyéshechik
Had taken a fancy
At once to our roubles.
Because after that
Every year we were summoned
To go to Korójin,
We went, and were flogged.

... Shaláshnikov flogged like
A prince, but be certain
The treasures he thrashed from
The doughty Korójins
Were not of much weight.
The weak yielded soon,
But the strong stood like iron
For the commune. I also
Bore up, and I thought :
" Though never so stoutly
You flog us, you dog's son,
You won't drag the whole soul
From out of the peasant ;
Some trace will be left."

... When the Barin was sated
We went from the town,
But we stopped on the outskirts
To share what was over.
And plenty there was, too !
Shaláshnikov, heh,
You're a fool ! It was our turn
To laugh at the Barin ;
Ah, they were proud peasants—

The plucky Korójins !
But nowadays show them
The tail of a knout,
And they'll fly to the Barin, 310
And beg him to take
The last coin from their pockets.

Well, that's why we all lived
Like merchants in those days.
One summer came tidings
To us that our Barin

Now owned us no longer,
That he had, at Varna,
Been killed. We weren't sorry.
But somehow we thought then : 320

"The peasants' good fortune
Has come to an end !"

The heir made a new move :
He sent us a German.¹

Through vast, savage forests,
Through sly sucking bogs
And on foot came the German.
As bare as a finger.

"As melting as butter
At first was the German : 330

"Just give what you can, then."
He'd say to the peasants.

"We've nothing to give !"

"I'll explain to the Barin."

"Explain," we replied,
And were troubled no more.

¹ Germans were often employed as managers on the Pomyéshchicks' estates.

It seemed he was going
 To live in the village ;
 He soon settled down,
 On the banks of the river
 For hour after hour
 He sat peacefully fishing,
 And striking his nose
 Or his cheek or his forehead
 We laughed : " You don't like
 The Korójin mosquitoes ? "
 He'd boat near the bankside
 And shout with enjoyment,
 Like one in the bath-house
 Who's got to the roof !

... With youths and young maidens
 He strolled in the forest
 (They were not for nothing
 Those strolls in the forest !)

" Well, if you can't pay
 You should work, little peasants."

... " What work should we do ? "

" " You should dig some deep ditches
 To drain off the bog-lands."

We dig some deep ditches. 36

" " And now trim the forest."

" " Well, well, trim the forest. . . . "

We hacked and we hewed

As the German directed,

And when we look round

There's a road through the forest !

In Russian vapour-baths there are shelves ranged
 round the walls for the bathers to recline upon. The
 higher the shelf the hotter the atmosphere.

... The German went driving
To town with three horses ;
Look ! now he is coming

With boxes and bedding,

And God knows wherefrom

Has this bare-footed German
Raised wife and small children !

And now he's established

A village ispravnik,¹

They live like two brothers.

His courtyard at all times

Is teeming with strangers,

And even to the peasants

The ... n Korójins !

He sucked us all dry

To the very last farthing ;

And flog !—like the soul

Of Shaláshnikov flogged he !

Shaláshnikov stopped

When he got what he wanted ;

He clung to our backs

Till he'd glugged his stomach,

And then he dropped down

Like a leech from a dog's ear.

But he had the grip

Of a corpse—had this German ;

Until he had left you

Stripped bare like a beggar

You couldn't escape .

... But how could you bear it ?

... Ah, how could we bear it ?

Because we were giants .

Because by their patience

Police-official.

The people of Russia
Are great, little Grandchild.
You think, then, Matróna,
That we Russian peasants
No warriors are ?

Why, truly the peasant
Does not live in armour,
Does not die in warfare,
But nevertheless

He's a warrior, child.
His hands are bound tight,
And his feet hung with fetters ;
His back—mighty forests
Have broken across it ;
His breast—I will tell you,
The Prophet Elijah

In chariot fiery
Is thundering within it ;
And these things the peasant
Can suffer in patience.

He bends—but he breaks not ;
He reels—but he falls not ;
Then is he not truly
A warrior, say ?

“ ‘ You joke, little Grandad ;
Such warriors, surely,
A tiny mouse nibbling
Could crumble to atoms,’
I said to Savyéli.

“ ‘ I know not, Matróna,
But up till to-day
He has stood with his burden ;
He's sunk in the earth

'Neath its weight to his shoulders ;
His face is not moistened
With sweat, but with heart's blood.

I don't know what may
Come to pass in the future,
I can't think what will
Come to pass—only God knows.

For my part, I know
When the storm howls in winter,
When old bones are painful,
I lie on the oven,

I lie, and am thinking :
“ Eh, you, strength of giants,
On what have they spent you ?
On what are you wasted ?

With whips and with rods
They will pound you to dust ! ”

“ ‘ But what of the German,
Savyéli ? ’

“ ‘ The German ?
Well, well, though he lived
Like a lord in his glory
For eighteen long years,
We were waiting our day.
Then the German considered
A factory needful,
And wanted a pit dug.

'Twas work for nine peasants.

We started at daybreak
And laboured till mid-day,
And then we were going

To rest and have dinner.
When up comes the German :

440

450

460

430

" Eh, you, lazy devils !
So little work done ? "

He started to nag us,
Quite coolly and slowly,
Without heat or hurry ;
For that was his way.

479

" And we, tired and hungry,
Stood listening in silence.
He kicked the wet earth
With his boot while he scolded,
Not far from the edge
Of the pit. I stood near him,
And happened to give him
A push with my shoulder ;
Then somehow a second

480

And third pushed him gently. . . .
We spoke not a word,
Gave no sign to each other,
But silently, slowly,
Drew closer together,
And edging the German
Respectfully forward.

We brought him at last
To the brink of the hollow. . . .

490

He tumbled in headlong !
" A ladder ! " he bellows ;
Nine shovels reply.
" Naddai ! " ¹—the word fell
From my lips on the instant,
The word to which people
Work gaily in Russia ;
" Naddai ! " and " Naddai ! "
And we laboured so bravely

¹ He, re-to !

That soon not a trace
Of the pit was remaining, 500
The earth was as smooth
As before we had touched it ;
And then we stopped short
And we looked at each other. . . .

"The old man was silent.
'What further, Savyéli ?'

"What further ? Ah, bad times :
The prison in Buy-Town
(I learnt there my letters),
Until we were sentenced ; 510
The convict-mines later ;
And plenty of lashes.

But I never frowned
At the lash in the prison ;
They flogged us but poorly.
And later I nearly

Escaped to the forest ;
They caught me, however.
Of course they did not
Pat my head for their trouble ; 520
The Governor was through

Siberia famous
For flogging. But had not
Shaláshnikov flogged us ?

I spit at the floggings
I got in the prison !

Ah, he was a Master !
He knew how to flog you !

He toughened my hide so
You see it has served me 530
For one hundred years,

And 'twill serve me another.

But life was not easy,

I tell you, Matróna :

First twenty years prison,

Then twenty years exile.

I saved up some money,

And when I came home,

Built this hut for myself.

And here I have lived

For a great many years now

They loved the old grandad

So long as he'd money,

But now it has gone

They would part with him gladly,

They spit in his face.

Eh, you plucky toy heroes !

You're fit to make war

Upon old men and women !

540

“ And that was as much
As the grandfather told me.”

550

“ And now for your story,”
They answer Matróna.

“ 'Tis not very bright.
From one trouble God

In His goodness preserved me :
For Sitnikov died

Of the cholera. Soon, though,
Another arose,

I will tell you about it.”

560

“ Naddai ! ” say the peasants
(They love the word well),
They are filling the glasses.

DJÓMUSIIKA

"The little tree burns
For the lightning has struck it.
The nightingale's nest
Has been built in its branches.
The little tree burns,
It is sighing and groaning :
The nightingale's children
Are crying and calling :
' Oh, come, little Mother !
Oh, come, little Mother ! 10
Take care of us, Mother,
Until we can fly.
Till our wings have grown stronger,
Until we can fly
To the peaceful green forest.
Until we can fly
To the far silent valleys. . . .
The poor little tree—
It is burnt to grey ashes ;
The poor little fledgelings 20
Are burnt to grey ashes.
The mother flies home,
But the tree . . . and the fledgelings . . .
The nest. . . . She is calling,
Lamenting and calling ;
She circles around,
She is sobbing and moaning ;
She circles so quickly,
She circles so quickly,
Her tiny wings whistle. 30
The dark night has fallen.

The dark world is silent,
But one little creature
Is helplessly grieving
And cannot find comfort ;—
The nightingale only
Laments for her children. . . .
She never will see them
Again, though she call them
Till breaks the white day. . . .
I carried my baby
Asleep in my bosom
To work in the meadows.
But Mother-in-law cried.
' Come, leave him behind you.
At home with Savyéli,
You'll work better then.'
And I was so timid,
So tired of her scolding,
I left him behind.

' That year it so happened
The harvest was richer
Than ever we'd known it ;
The reaping was hard,
But the reapers were merry,
I sang as I mounted
The sheaves on the waggon.
(The waggons are loaded
To laughter and singing ;
The sledges in silence,
With thoughts sad and bitter ;
The waggons convey the corn
Home to the peasants,
The sledges will bear it
Away to the market.)

.. But as I was working
I heard of a sudden
A deep groan of anguish :
I saw old Savyéli
Creep trembling towards me, 70
His face white as death :
· Forgive me, Matróna !
Forgive me, Matróna !
I sinned. . . . I was careless.
He fell at my feet.

.. Oh, stay, little swallow !
Your nest build not there !
Not there 'neath the leafless
Bare bank of the river :
The water will rise, 80
And your children will perish.
Oh, poor little woman,
Young wife and young mother,
The daughter-in-law
And the slave of the household,
Bear blows and abuse,
Suffer all things in silence,
But let not your baby
Be torn from your bosom. . . .
Savyéli had fallen 90
Asleep in the sunshine,
And Djóma—the pigs
Had attacked him and killed him.

“ I fell to the ground
And lay writhing in torture ;
I bit the black earth
And I shrieked in wild anguish ;

I called on his name,
And I thought in my madness
My voice must awake him. . . .

“ Hark !—horses’ hoofs stamping,¹
And harness-bells jangling —
Another misfortune !
The children are frightened.
They run to the houses ;
And outside the window
The old men and women
Are talking in whispers
And nodding together.
The Elder is running
And tapping each window
In turn with his staff ;
Then he runs to the hayfields,
He runs to the pastures,
To summon the people.
They come, full of sorrow—
Another misfortune !
And God in His wrath
Has sent guests that are hateful,
Has sent unjust judges.
Perhaps they want money ?
Their coats are worn threadbare ?
Perhaps they are hungry ?

“ Without greeting Christ
They sit down at the table,

¹ This paragraph refers to the custom of the country police in Russia, who, on hearing of the accidental death of anybody in a village, will, in order to extract bribes from the villagers, threaten to hold an inquest on the corpse. The peasants are usually ready to part with nearly all they possess in order to save their dead from what they consider desecration.

They've set up an icon
And cross in the middle :
Our pope, Father John,
Swears the witnesses singly.

.. They question Savyéli, 130
And then a policeman
Is sent to find me,
While the officer, swearing,
Is striding about
Like a beast in the forest. . . .
'Now, woman, confess it,'
He cries when I enter,
'You lived with the peasant
Savyéli in sin ?'

"I whisper in answer, 140
'Kind sir, you are joking.
I am to my husband
A wife without stain.
And the peasant Savyéli
Is more than a hundred
Years old ;—you can see it.'

.. He's stamping about
Like a horse in the stable :
In fury he's thumping
His fist on the table. 150
'Be silent ! Confess, then,
That you with Savyéli
Had plotted to murder
Your child !'

"Holy Mother !
What horrible ravings !

My God, give me patience,
And let me not strangle
The wicked blasphemer !
I looked at the doctor
And shuddered in terror :
Before him lay lancets,
Sharp scissors, and knives.
I conquered myself,
For I knew why they lay there.
I answer him trembling,
' I loved little Djóma,
I would not have harmed him.'

100

“ And did you not poison him.
Give him some powder ? ”

170

“ Oh, Heaven forbid ! ’
I kneel to him, crying,
‘ Be gentle ! Have mercy !
And grant that my baby
In honour be buried,
Forbid them to thrust
The cruel knives in his body !
Oh, I am his mother ! ’

“ Can anything move them ?
No hearts they possess,
In their eyes is no conscience,
No cross at their throats. . . .

171

“ They have lifted the napkin
Which covered my baby ;
His little white body
With scissors and lancets
They worry and torture. . .

The room has grown darker,
I'm struggling and screaming,
100 ' You butchers ! You fiends ! 190
Not on earth, not on water,
And not on God's temple
My tears shall be showered ;
But straight on the souls
Of my hellish tormentors !
Oh, hear me, just God !
May Thy curse fall and strike them !
Ordain that their garments
May rot on their bodies !
Their eyes be struck blind, 200
And their brains seorch in madness !
170 Their wives be unfaithful,
Their children be crippled !
Oh, hear me, just God !
Hear the prayers of a mother,
And look on her tears,—
Strike these pitiless devils !'
“ She's crazy, the woman !’
The officer shouted,
‘ Why did you not tell us 210
Before ? Stop this fooling !
Or else I shall order
My men, here, to bind you.
“ I sank on the bench,
I was trembling all over ;
I shook like a leaf
As I gazed at the doctor :
His sleeves were rolled backwards,
A knife was in one hand,
A cloth in the other, 220
And blood was upon it :

His glasses were fixed

On his nose. All was silent
The office

Began scribbling on paper;
The motionless servants

Stood gloomy and mournful
The people hit his pipe

And sat watching the doctor
He said, 'You are really

A heart with a knife
I started up wildly;

I knew that the doctor
Was piercing the heart
Of my little dead baby

'Now, bind her the six
The officer's outed;

'He's mad!' He led
To inquire of the peasants

'Have none of you
Before that the woman
Korchukova

'No,'

And

He

They

We never

That

Matro

here this morning

going with her

you.'

And then the old man
 Began bitter caving.
 The officer frowning
 Sat down and said nothing.
 And then I remembered :
 When it was made
 A piece of new linen
 Which I had made ready
 Was still in my box
 So rotten to touch it :
 And now I had seen them
 Size Djómushka's body
 And tear it to pieces.
 I think at that moment
 I turned it to marble :
 I watched while the doctor
 Was drinking the vodka
 And washing his hands ;
 I saw how he red
 The glass to
 And I heard : pe answer.
 Why ask me ? mortals
 Are pitiful sinners,
 We don't need much urging
 To empty a glass ! ' 280
 The peasants are standing
 In fear, and are thinking :
 ' Now, how did these victors
 Get wind of the matter ?
 Who told them that here
 There was chance of some profit ?
 They dashed in like wolves,
 Seized the beards of the peasants,
 And snarled in their faces
 Like savage hyenas 280

.. And now they are feasting,
 Are eating and drinking ;
 They chat with the pope,
 He is murmuring to them,
 ' The people in these parts
 Are beggars and drunken ;
 They owe me for countless
 Confessions and weddings ;
 They'll take their last farthing
 To spend in the tavern ;
 And nothing but sins
 Do they bring to their priest.'

300

.. And then I hear singing
 In clear, girlish voices—
 I know them all well :
 There's Natásha and Glásha,
 And Dáriushka.—Jesus
 Have mercy upon them !
 Hark ! steps and accordion ;
 Then there is silence.
 I think I had fallen
 Asleep ; then I fancied
 That somebody entering
 Bent over me, saying,
 ' Sleep, woman of sorrows,
 Exhausted by sorrow,'
 And making the sign
 Of the cross on my forehead.
 I felt that the ropes
 On my body were loosened,
 And then I remembered
 No more. In black darkness
 I woke, and astonished
 I ran to the window :

310

320

Deep night lay around me—

What's happened? Where am I?

I ran to the street,—

It was empty, in Heaven

No moon and no stars,

And a great cloud of darkness 330

Spread over the village.

The huts of the peasants

Were dark; only one hut

Was brilliantly lighted,

It shone like a palace—

The hut of Savyéli.

I ran to the doorway,

And then . . . I remembered.

“The table was gleaming

With yellow wax candles, 340

And there, in the midst.

Lay a tiny white coffin,

And over it spread

Was a fine coloured napkin,

An icon was placed

At its head. . . .

O you builders,

For my little son

What a house you have fashioned!

No windows you've made 350

That the sunshine may enter,

No stove and no bench,

And no soft little pillows. . . .

Oh, Djómushka will not

Feel happy within it,

He cannot sleep well. . . .

‘Begone!’—I cried harshly

On seeing Savyéli;

He stood near the coffin
 And read from the book 360
 In his hand, through his glasses.
 I cursed old Savyéli,
 Cried—' Branded one ! Convict !
 Begone ! 'Twas you killed him !
 You murdered my Djóma,
 Begone from my sight ! '

" He stood without moving ;
 He crossed himself thrice
 And continued his reading.
 But when I grew calmer 370
 Savyéli approached me,
 And said to me gently,
 ' In winter, Matróna,
 I told you my story,
 But yet there was more.
 Our forests were endless,
 Our lakes wild and lonely,
 Our people were savage ;
 By cruelty lived we :
 By snaring the wood-grouse, 380
 By slaying the bears :—
 You must kill or you perish !
 I've told you of Barin
 Shaláshnikov, also
 Of how we were robbed
 By the villainous German,
 And then of the prison,
 The exile, the mines.
 My heart was like stone
 I grew wild and fer 390
 My winter had lasted
 A century, Grandchila,

360 But your little Djóma
Had melted its frosts.
One day as I rocked him
He smiled of a sudden,
And I smiled in answer. . . .
A strange thing befell me
Some days after that :
As I prowled in the forest 400
I aimed at a squirrel ;
But suddenly noticed
How happy and playful
It was, in the branches :
370 Its bright little face
With its paw it sat washing.
I lowered my gun :
“ You shall live, little squirrel ! ”
I rambled about
In the woods, in the meadows, 410
And each tiny floweret
I loved. I went home then
And nursed little Djóma,
And played with him, laughing.
380 God knows how I loved him,
The innocent babe !
And now . . . through my folly,
My sin, . . . he has perished. . . .
Upbraid me and kill me.
But nothing can help you, 420
With God one can't argue. . . .
Stand up now, Matróna,
And pray for your baby ;
God acted with reason :
390 He's counted the joys
In the life of a peasant !

" Long, long did Savyéli
 Stand bitterly speaking,
 The piteous fate
 Of the peasant he painted ; 430
 And if a rich Barin,
 A merchant or noble,
 If even our Father
 The Tsar had been listening,
 Savyéli could not
 Have found words which were truer.
 Have spoken them better. . . .

" ' Now Djóma is happy
 And safe, in God's Heaven,'
 He said to me later. 440
 His tears began falling. . . .

" ' I do not complain
 That God took him, Savyéli,'
 I said,—' but the insult
 They did him torments me,
 It's racking my heart.
 Why did vicious black ravens
 Alight on his body
 And tear it to pieces ?
 Will neither our God 450
 Nor our Tsar—Little Father—
 Arise to defend us ? '

" ' But God, little Grandchild,
 Is high, and the Tsar
 Far away,' said Savyéli.

" I cried, ' Yet I'll reach them ! '

430 " But Grandfather answered,
 ' Now hush, little Grandchild,
You woman of sorrow,
 Bow down and have patience ;
No truth you will find
 In the world, and no justice.' 460

 " But why then, Savyéli ? "

uer. " ' A bondswoman, Grandchild,
 You are ; and for such
Is no hope,' said Savyéli.

440 " For long I sat darkly
And bitterly thinking.
 The thunder pealed forth
And the windows were shaken ;
 I started ! Savyéli 470
Drew nearer and touched me,
 And led me to stand
By the little white coffin :

450 " ' Now pray that the Lord
 May have placed little Djóma
Among the bright ranks
 Of His angels,' he whispered ;
A candle he placed
 In my hand. . . . And I knelt there 480
The whole of the night
 Till the pale dawn of daybreak :
The grandfather stood
 Beside Djómushka's coffin
And read from the book
 In a measured low voice. . . . "

CHAPTER V

THE SHE-WOLF

'Tis twenty years now
Since my Djóma was taken,
Was carried to sleep
Neath his little grass blanket ;
And still my heart bleeds.
And I pray for him always.
No apple till Spassa ¹
I touch with my lips. . . .

For long I lay ill,
Not a word did I utter, 10
My eyes could not suffer
The old man, Savyéli.
No work did I do,
And my Father-in-law thought
To give me a lesson
And took down the horse-reins ;
I bowed to his feet,
And cried - ' Kill me ! Oh, kill me !
I pray for the end ! '
He hung the reins up, then. 20
I lived day and night
On the grave of my Djóma.
I dusted it clean
With a soft little napkin
That grass might grow green.
And I prayed for my lost one.
I yearned for my parents :
' Oh, you have forgotten,
Forgotten your daughter ! '

¹ The Saviour's day.

“ ‘ We have not forgotten
Our poor little daughter,
But is it worth while, say,
To wear the grey horse out
By such a long journey
To learn about you . . .
To tell you of ours ?
Since long, little daughter,
Would father and mother
Have journeyed to see you,
But ever the thought rose :
She'll weep at our coming,
She'll shriek when we leave ! ’ ”

In winter came Philip,
Our sorrow together
We shared, and together
We fought with our grief
In the grandfather's hut.”

“ The grandfather died, then ? ”

“ Oh, no, in his cottage
For seven whole days
He lay still without speaking,
And then he got up
And he went to the forest ;
And there old Savyéli
So wept and lamented,
The woods were set throbbing.
In autumn he left us
And went as a pilgrim
On foot to do penance
At some distant convent. . . . ”

“ I went with my husband
To visit my parents,

And then began working
Again. Three years followed,
Each week like the other,
As twin to twin brother,
And each year a child.

There was no time for thinking
And no time for grieving ;

Praise God if you have time
For getting your work done
And crossing your forehead.
You eat—when there's something
Left over at table,
When elders have eaten,
When children have eaten ;
You sleep—when you're ill. . . .

“ In the fourth year came sorrow
Again ; for when sorrow

Once lightens upon you
To death he pursues you ;
He circles before you—

A bright shining falcon ;
He hovers behind you —
An ugly black raven ;
He flies in advance—

But he will not forsake you ;
He lingers behind—
But he will not forget. . . .

“ I lost my dear parents.
The dark nights alone knew
The grief of the orphan ;
No need is there, brothers,
To tell you about it.
With tears did I water
The grave of my baby.

From far once I noticed
 A wooden cross standing
 Ereect at its head,
 And a little gilt icon ; 100
 A figure is kneeling
 Before it—' Savyéli !
 From whence have you come ? '

70 " ' I have come from Pesótna.
 I've prayed for the soul
 Of our dear little Djóma ;
 I've prayed for the peasants
 Of Russia. . . . Matróna,
 Once more do I pray
 Oh, Matróna . . . Matróna. . . . 110
 I pray that the heart
 Of the mother, at last,
 May be softened towards me. . . .
 80 Forgive me, Matróna ! '

 " ' Oh, long, long ago
 I forgave you, Savyéli.'
 " ' Then look at me now
 As in old times, Matróna ! '

90 " I looked as of old.
 Then up rose Savyéli,
 And gazed in my eyes ; 120
 He was trying to straighten
 His stiffened old back ;
 Like the snow was his hair now.
 I kissed the old man,
 And my new grief I told him ;
 For long we sat weeping
 And mourning together.
 He did not live long

After that. In the autumn
 A deep wound appeared
 In his neck, and he sickened.
 He died very hard.
 For a hundred days, fully,
 No food passed his lips ;
 To the bone he was shrunken.
 He laughed at himself :
 ' Tell me, truly, Matróna,
 Now am I not like
 A Korójin mosquito ? ' 142

At times the old man
 Would be gentle and patient :
 At times he was angry
 And nothing would please him ;
 He frightened us all
 By his outbursts of fury :
 ' Eh, plough not, and sow not,
 You downtrodden peasants !
 You women, sit spinning
 And weaving no longer ! 152
 However you struggle,
 You fools, you must perish !
 You will not escape
 What by fate has been written !
 Three roads are spread out
 For the peasant to follow
 They lead to the tavern,
 The mines, and the prison !
 Three nooses are hung
 For the women of Russia : 162
 The one is of white silk,
 The second of red silk,
 The third is of black silk -

Choose that which you please !
And Grandfather laughed
In a manner which caused us
To tremble with fear
And draw nearer together. . . .
He died in the night,
And we did as he asked us. . . . 170
We laid him to rest
In the grave beside Djóma.
The Grandfather lived
To a hundred and seven. . . .

“ Four years passed away then,
The one like the other,
And I was submissive,
The slave of the household.
For Mother-in-law
And her husband the drunkard, 180
For Sister-in-law
By all suitors rejected.
I'd draw off their boots—
Only,—touch not my children !
For them I stood firm
Like a rock. Once it happened
A pilgrim arrived
At our village—a holy
And pious-tongued woman ;
She spoke to the people 190
Of how to please God
And of how to reach Heaven.
She said that on fast-days
No woman should offer
The breast to her child.
The women obeyed her :
On Wednesdays and Fridays

The village was filled
 By the wailing of babies ;
 And many a mother
 Sat bitterly weeping
 To hear her child cry
 For its food — full of pity,
 But fearing God's anger
 But I did not listen
 I said to myself
 That if penance were needful
 The mothers must suffer,
 But not little children.
 I said, ' I am guilty,
 My God — not my children ! '

200

210

" It seems God was angry
 And punished me for it
 Through my little son,
 My Father-in-law
 To the commune had offered
 My little Fedotka
 As help to the shepherd
 When he was turned eight
 One night I was waiting
 To give him his supper ;
 The cattle already
 Were home, but he came not.
 I went through the village
 And saw that the people
 Were gathered together
 And talking of something
 I listened, then elbowed
 My way through the people ;
 Fedotka was set
 In their midst, pale and trembling.

220

2

The Elder was gripping
His ear. 'What has happened?
And why do you hold him?'
I said to the Elder.

'I'm going to beat him, —
He threw a young lamb
To the wolf,' he replied.

'I snatched my Fedótka
Away from their clutches;
And somehow the Elder
Fell down on the ground!

'The story was strange:
It appears that the shepherd
Went home for awhile,
Leaving little Fedótka
In charge of the flock.

'I was sitting,' he told me,
Alone on the hillside,
When all of a sudden
A wolf ran close by me
And picked Masha's lamb up.

I threw myself at him,
I whistled and shouted,
I cracked with my whip,
Blow my horn for Valótka,
And then I gave chase.
I run fast, little Mother,
But still I could never
Have followed the robber
If not for the traces
She left, because, Mother,
Her breasts hung so low
(She was suckling her children)

They dragged on the earth
And left two tracks of blood.
But further the grey one
Went slower and slower ;
And then she looked back
And she saw I was coming.

270

At last she sat down.
With my whip then I lashed her ;
“ Come, give me the lamb,
You grey devil ! ” She crouched,
But would not give it up.
I said—“ I must save it
Although she should kill me.”

I threw myself on her
And snatched it away,
But she did not attack me.
The lamb was quite dead.

280

She herself was scarce living.
She gnashed with her teeth
And her breathing was heavy ;
And two streams of blood ran
From under her body.

Her ribs could be counted,
Her head was hung down,
But her eyes, little Mother,
Looked straight into mine . . .

290

Then she groaned of a sudden,
She groaned, and it sounded
As if she were crying.
I threw her the lamb.” . . .

“ Well, that was the story.
And foolish Fedótka
Ran back to the village
And told them about it.

THE SHE-WOLF

247

And they, in their anger,
Were going to beat him 300

When I came upon them.
The Elder, because

Of his fall, was indignant,
He shouted—'How dare you!

Do you want a beating
Yourself?' And the woman

Whose lamb had been stolen
Cried, 'Whip the lad soundly,

'Twill teach him a lesson!'
Fedótka she pulled from 310

My arms, and he trembled,
He shook like a leaf.

“Then the horns of the huntsmen
Were heard,—the Pomyéshechick

Returning from hunting.
I ran to him, crying,

'Oh, save us! Protect us!'

“‘What's wrong? Call the Elder!’

And then, in an instant,
The matter is settled: 320

'The shepherd is tiny—

His youth and his folly
May well be forgiven.

The woman's presumption
You'll punish severely!'

“‘Oh, Barin, God bless you!’
I danced with delight!

'Fedótka is safe now!
Run home, quick, Fedótka.'

“‘Your will shall be done, sir.’ 330

The Elder said, bowing ;
 ' Now, woman, prepare ;
 You can dance later on ! '

" A gossip then whispered,
 ' Fall down at the feet
 Of the Elder—beg mercy ! '

" ' Fedótka—go home ! '

" Then I kissed him, and told him :
 ' Remember, Fedótka,
 That I shall be angry
 If once you look backwards.
 Run home ! '

549

" Well, my brothers,
 To leave out a word
 Of the song is to spoil it,—
 I lay on the ground. . . .

* * * * *

" I crawled like a cat
 To Fedótushka's corner
 That night. He was sleeping,
 He tossed in his dream.
 One hand was hung down,
 While the other, clenched tightly,
 Was shielding his eyes :

350

' You've been crying, my treasure ;
 Sleep, darling, it's nothing
 See, Mother is near ! '

I'd lost little Djóma
 While heavy with this one ;
 He was but a weakling,
 But grew very clever.

351

He works with his dad now.

And built such a chimney
With him, for his master,
The like of it never
Was seen. Well, I sat there
The whole of the night
By the sweet little shepherd.
At daybreak I crossed him,
I fastened his laputs,
I gave him his wallet,
His horn and his whip.
The rest began stirring.
But nothing I told them
Of all that had happened.
But that day I stayed
From the work in the fields.

“ I went to the banks
Of the swift little river,
I sought for a spot
Which was silent and lonely
Amid the green rushes
That grow by the bank.

“ And on the grey stone
I sat down, sick and weary,
And leaning my head
On my hands, I lamented,
Poor sorrowing orphan.
And loudly I called
On the names of my parents :
“ Oh, come, little Father,
My tender protector !
Oh, look at the daughter
You cherished and loved ! ”

“ In vain do I call him !

The loved one has left me ;
The guest without iord,
Without race, without kindred,
Named Death has appeared,
And has calied him away.

.. And wildly I summon
My mother, my mother !
The boisterous wind cries,
The distant hills answer.
But mother is dead.
She can hear me no longer !

· You grieved day and night,
And you prayed for me always,
But never, beloved,
Shall I see you again ;
You cannot turn back now,
And I may not follow.

.. A pathway so strange,
So unknown, you have chosen.
The beasts cannot find it,
The winds cannot reach it,
My voice will be lost
In the terrible distance. . . .

.. My loving protectors,
If you could but see me !
Could know what your daughter
Must suffer without you !
Could learn of the people
To whom you have left her !

· By night bathed in tears,
And by day weak and trembling,
I bow like the grass

To the wind, but in secret
A heart full of fury
Is gnawing my breast ! ”

CHAPTER VI

AN UNLUCKY YEAR

“ Strange stars played that year
On the face of the Heavens ;

And some said, ‘ The Lord rides
Abroad, and His angels

With long flaming brooms sweep
The floor of the Heavens

In front of his carriage.’
But others were frightened, -

They said, ‘ It is rather
The Antichrist coming !

It signals misfortune ! ’
And they read it truly.

A terrible year came,
A terrible famine,

When brother denied
To his brother a morsel.

And then I remembered
The wolf that was hungry

For I was like her,
Craving food for my children.

Now Mother-in-law found
A new superstition .

She said to the neighbours
That I was the reason

Of all the misfortune :
And why ? I had caused it

10

20

THE PEASANT WOMAN

By changing my shirt
On the day before Christmas !
Well, I escaped lightly,
For I had a husband
To shield and protect me,
But one woman, having
Offended, was beaten
To death by the people.
To play with the starving
Is dangerous, my friends.

“ The famine was scarcely
At end, when another
Misfortune befell us
The dreaded recruiting.
But I was not troubled
By that, because Philip
Was safe : one already
Had served of his people.
One night I sat working,
My husband, his brothers,
The family, all had
Been out since the morning.
My Father-in-law
Had been called to take part
In the communal meeting.
The women were standing
And chatting with neighbours.
But I was exhausted,
For then I was heavy
With child. I was ailing.
And hourly expected
My time. When the children
Were fed and asleep
I lay down on the oven.

The women came home soon
And called for their suppers ;

But Father-in-la
Had not come, so we waited.

He came, tired and gloomy :
‘ Eh, wife, we are ruined !

I’m weary with running,
But nothing can save us :

They’ve taken the eldest

Now give them the youngest !

70

I’ve counted the years

To a day - I have proved them :

They listen to nothing.

They want to take Philip !

I prayed to the commune -

But what is it worth ?

I ran to the bailiff ;

He swore he was sorry

But couldn’t assist us.

I went to the clerk then .

80

You might just as well

Set to work with a hatchet

To chop out the shadows

Up there, on the ceiling,

As try to get truth

Out of that little rascal !

He’s bought. They are all bought.

Not one of them honest !

If only he knew it

The Governor - he’d teach them !

90

If he would but order

The commune to show him

The lists of the volost,

And see how they cheat us !

The mother and daughters

Are groaning and crying ;
 But I ! . . . I am cold. . . .
 I am burning in fever ! . . .
 My thoughts . . . I have no thoughts !
 I think I am dreaming ! 100
 My fatherless children
 Are standing before me,
 And crying with hunger.
 The family, frowning,
 Looks coldly upon them. . . .
 At home they are ' noisy,
 At play they are ' clumsy,'
 At table they're ' gluttons ' !
 And somebody threatens
 To punish my children- 11
 They slap them and pinch them !
 Be silent, you mother !
 You wife of a soldier !

* * * *

' I now have no part
 In the village allotments,
 No share in the building,
 The clothes, and the cattle,
 And these are my riches :
 Three lakes of salt tear-drops,
 Three fields sown with grief ! 12

* * * *

' And now, like a sinner,
 I bow to the neighbours ;
 I ask their forgiveness ;
 I hear myself saying,
 ' Forgive me for being
 So haughty and proud !
 I little expected

That God, for my pride,
Would have left me forsaken !

I pray you, good people,
To show me more wisdom,
To teach me to live
And to nourish my children,
What food they should have,
And what drink, and what teaching.

* * * * *

“ I’m sending my children
To beg in the village ;
‘ Go, children, beg humbly,
But dare not to steal.’

The children are sobbing,
‘ It’s cold, little Mother,
Our clothes are in rags ;

We are weary of passing
From doorway to doorway ;
We stand by the windows
And shiver. We’re frightened
To beg of the rich folk ;
The poor ones say, “ God will
Provide for the orphans ! ”

We cannot come home,
For if we bring nothing
We know you’ll be angry ! ”

* * * * *

“ To go to God’s church
I have made myself tidy ;
I hear how the neighbours
Are laughing around me :
‘ Now who is she setting
Her cap at ? ’ they whisper.

* * * * *

Don't wash yourself clean,
 And don't dress yourself nicely ; 166
 The neighbours are sharp—
 They have eyes like the eagle
 And tongues like the serpent.
 Walk humbly and slowly,
 Don't laugh when you're cheerful,
 Don't weep when you're sad.

* * * * *
 " The dull, endless winter
 Has come, and the fields
 And the pretty green meadows
 Are hidden away 172
 'Neath the snow. Nothing living
 Is seen in the folds
 Of the gleaming white grave-clothes.
 No friend under Heaven
 There is for the woman,
 The wife of the soldier.
 Who knows what her thoughts are ?
 Who cares for her words ?
 Who is sad for her sorrow ?
 And where can she bury 180
 The insults they cast her ?
 Perhaps in the woods ?
 But the woods are all withered !
 Perhaps in the meadows ?
 The meadows are frozen !
 The swift little stream ?
 But its waters are sleeping !
 No, carry them with you
 To hide in your grave !

* * * * *
 " My husband is gone ; 186

There is no one to shield me.
Hark, hark ! There's the drum !

And the soldiers are coming !
They halt ;— they are forming
A line in the market.

' Attention ! ' There's Philip !

There's Philip ! I see him !

' Attention ! Eyes front ! '

It's Shaláshnikov shouting. . . .

Oh, Philip has fallen !

200

Have mercy ! Have mercy !

' Try that—try some physic ! '

You'll soon get to like it !

Ha, ha ! Ha, ha, ha ! '

He is striking my husband !

I flog, not with whips,

But with knouts made for giants ! '

* * * * *

' I sprang from the stove,

Though my burden was heavy ;

I listen. . . . All silent. . . .

210

The family sleeping.

I creep to the doorway

And open it softly,

I pass down the street

Through the night. . . . It is frosty.

In Domina's hut.

Where the youths and young maidens
Assemble at night,

They are singing in chorus

My favourite song :

220

' The fir tree on the mountain stands,

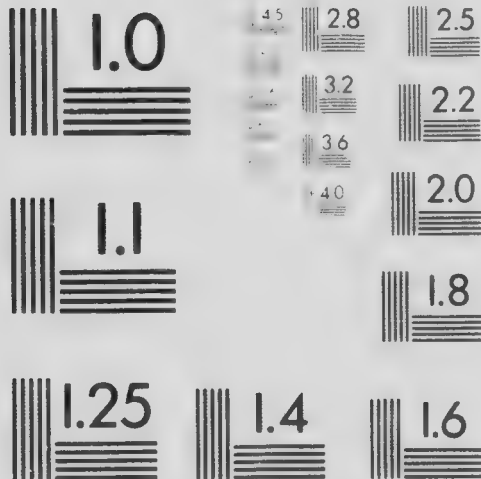
The little cottage at its foot,

And Máshenka is there.



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Her father comes to look for her,
He wakens her and coaxes her :
“ Eh, Máshenka, come home,” he cries,
“ Efeémovna, come home ! ”

“ “ “ I won’t come, and I won’t listen !
Black the night—no moon in Heaven !
Swift the stream—no bridge, no ferry !
Dark the wood—no guards.” 231

“ “ The fir tree on the mountain stands,
The little cottage at its foot,
And Máshenka is there.
Her mother comes to look for her,
She wakens her and coaxes her :
“ Now, Máshenka, come home,” she says,
“ Efeémovna, come home ! ”

“ “ “ I won’t come, and I won’t listen !
Black the night—no moon in Heaven !
Swift the stream—no bridge, no ferry !
Dark the wood—no guards ! ” 242

“ “ The fir tree on the mountain stands,
The little cottage at its foot,
And Máshenka is there.
Young Peter comes to look for her,
He wakens her, and coaxes her :
“ Oh, Máshenka, come home with me !
My little dove, Efeémovna,
Come home, my dear, with me.” 250

“ “ “ I will come, and I will listen,
Fair the night—the moon in Heaven,
Calm the stream with bridge and ferry.
In the wood strong guards.” ” ”

CHAPTER VII

THE GOVERNOR'S LADY

" I'm hurrying blindly,
 I've run through the village ;
 Yet strangely the singing
 From Domina's cottage
 Pursues me and rings
 In my ears. My pace slackens,
 I rest for awhile,
 And look back at the village :
 I see the white snowdrift
 O'er valley and meadow,
 The moon in the Heavens,
 My self, and my shadow. . . .

10

" I do not feel frightened ;
 A flutter of gladness
 Awakes in my bosom,
 ' You brisk winter breezes,
 My thanks for your freshness !
 I crave for your breath
 As the sick man for water.'
 My mind has grown clear,
 To my knees I am falling :
 ' O Mother of Christ !
 I beseech Thee to tell me
 Why God is so angry
 With me. Holy Mother !
 No tiniest bone
 In my limbs is unbroken ;
 No nerve in my body
 Uncrushed. I am patient,—

20

I have not complained. 30
All the strength that God gave me
I've spent on my work ;
All the love on my children.
But Thou seest all things,
And Thou art so mighty ;
Oh, succour thy slave !'

" I love now to pray
On a night clear and frosty ;
To kneel on the earth
'Neath the stars in the winter. 40
Remember, my brothers,
If trouble befall you,
To counsel your women
To pray in that manner ;
In no other place
Can one pray so devoutly,
At no other season. . . .

" I prayed and grew stronger ;
I bowed my hot head
To the cool snowy napkin, 50
And quickly my fever
Was spent. And when later
I looked at the roadway
I found that I knew it ;
I'd passed it before
On the mild summer evenings ;
At morning I'd greeted
The sunrise upon it
In haste to be off
To the fair. And I walked now 60
The whole of the night
Without meeting a soul. . . .

30 But now to the cities
The sledges are starting,
Piled high with the hay
Of the peasants. I watch them,
And pity the horses :
Their lawful provision

Themselves they are dragging
Away from the courtyard ;
And afterwards they
Will be hungry. I pondered :
The horses that work
Must eat straw, while the idlers
Are fed upon oats.

40 But when Need comes he hastens
To empty your corn-lofts,
Won't wait to be asked. . . .

" I come within sight
Of the town. On the outskirts
The merchants are cheating
And wheedling the peasants,
There's shouting and swearing,
Abusing and coaxing.

50 " I enter the town
As the bell rings for matins.

I make for the market
Before the cathedral.

I know that the gates
Of the Governor's courtyard
Are there. It is dark still,
The square is quite empty ;
In front of the courtyard
A sentinel paces :

60 ' Pray tell me, good man,
Does the Governor rise early ? '

“ ‘ Don’t know. Go away.
I’m forbidden to chatter.’
(I give him some farthings.)
‘ Well, go to the porter ;
He knows all about it.’

100

“ ‘ Where is he ? And what
Is his name, little sentry ? ’

“ ‘ Makhár Fedosséich,
He stands at the entrance.’
I walk to the entrance,
The doors are not opened.
I sit on the doorsteps
And think. . . .

“ It grows lighter,
A man with a ladder
Is turning the lamps down.

110

“ ‘ Heh, what are you doing ?
And how did you enter ? ’

“ I start in confusion,
I see in the doorway
A bald-headed man
In a bed-gown. Then quickly
I come to my senses,
And bowing before him
(Makhár Fedosséich),
I give him a rouble.

120

“ ‘ I come in great need
To the Governor, and see him
I must, little Uncle ! ’

" ' You can't see him, woman.
Well, well. . . . I'll consider. . . .
Return in two hours.'

" I see in the market'
A pedestal standing, 130
A peasant upon it,
He's just like Savyéli,
And all made of brass :
It's Susánin's memorial.
While crossing the market
I'm suddenly startled—
A heavy grey drake
From a cook is escaping ;
The fellow pursues
With a knife. It is shrieking. 140
My God, what a sound !
To the scul it has pierced me.
('Tis only the knife
That can wring such a shriek.)
The cook has now caught it ;
It stretches its neck,
Begins angrily hissing,
As if it would frighten
The cook,—the poor creature !
I run from the market, 150
I'm trembling and thinking,
' The drake will grow calm
' Neath the kiss of the knife !'

" The Governor's dwelling
Again is before me,
With balconies, turrets,
And steps which are covered
With beautiful carpets.

I gaze at the windows
All shaded with curtains.
'Now, which is your chamber,'
I think, 'my desired one ?'
Say, do you sleep sweetly ?
Of what are you dreaming ?'
I creep up the doorsteps,
And keep to the side
Not to tread on the carpets ;
And there, near the entrance,
I wait for the porter.

160

" ' You're early, my gossip ! '
Again I am startled :
A stranger I see,—
For at first I don't know him ;
A livery richly
Embroidered he wears now ;
He holds a fine staff ;
He's not bald any longer !
He laughs—' You were frightened ? '

170

" ' I'm tired, little Uncle.'

" ' You've plenty of courage,
God's mercy be yours !
Come, give me another,
And I will befriend you.'

180

" (I give him a rouble.)
' Now come, I will make you
Some tea in my office.'

" His den is just under
The stairs. There's a bedstead,

160 A little iron stove,
And a candlestick in it, 190
A big samovar,
And a lamp in the corner.
Some pictures are hung
On the wall. 'That's His Highness.'
The porter remarks,
And he points with his finger.
I look at the picture :
A warrior covered
With stars. 'Is he gentle ?'

170 " ' That's just as you happen 200
To find him. Why, neighbour,
The same is with me :
To-day I'm obliging,
At times I'm as cross
As a dog.'

" ' You are dull here,
Perhaps, little Uncle ? '

180 " ' Oh no, I'm not dull ;
I've a task that's exciting :
Ten years have I fought 210
With a foe : Sleep his name is.
And I can assure you
That when I have taken
An odd cup of vodka,
The stove is red hot,
And the smuts from the candle
Have blackened the air,
It's a desperate struggle ! '

" ' There's somebody knocking.
Makhár has gone out ; 220

I am sitting alone now.
 I go to the door
 And look out. In the courtyard
 A carriage is waiting.
 I ask, 'Is he coming?'
 'The lady is coming,'
 The porter makes answer,
 And hurries away
 To the foot of the staircase.
 A lady descends,
 Wrapped in costliest sables,
 A lackey behind her.
 I know not what followed
 (The Mother of God
 Must have come to my aid),
 It seems that I fell
 At the feet of the lady,
 And cried, 'Oh, protect us!
 They try to deceive us!
 My husband—the only
 Support of my children—
 They've taken away—
 Oh, they've acted unjustly! . . .

230

240

" 'Who are you, my pigeon?'

" 'My answer I know no .
 Or whether I gave one ;
 A sudden sharp pang tore
 My body in twain.

* * * *

" 'I opened my eyes
 In a beautiful chan.ber,
 In bed I was laid
 'Neath a canopy, brothers,

THE GOVERNOR'S LADY

267

And near me was sitting
A nurse, in a head-dress
All streaming with ribbons.
She's nursing a baby.
'Who's is it?' I ask her.

"It's yours, little Mother.'
I kiss my sweet child.

It seems, when I fell 260

At the feet of the lady,
I wept so and raved so,
Already so weakened
By grief and exhaustion,
That there, without warning,
My labour had seized me.

I bless the sweet lady,
Elyén Alexándrovna,
Only a mother
Could bless her as I do. 270

She christened my baby,
Lidórushka called him."

"And what of your husband?"

"They sent to the village
And started enquiries,
And soon he was righted.

Elyén Alexándrovna
Brought him herself
To my side. She was tender
And clever and lovely, 280

And healthy, but childless,
For God would not grant her
A child. While I stayed there
My baby was never
Away from her bosom.

She tended and nursed him
Herself, like a mother.
The spring had set in
And the birch trees were budding,
Before she would let us
Set out to go home.

290

“ Oh, how fair and bright
In God's world to-day !
Glad my heart and gay !

“ Homewards 'tis our way,
Near the wood we pause,
See, the meadows green,
Hark ! the waters play.
Rivulet so pure,
Little child of Spring,
How you leap and sing,
Rippling in the leaves !
High the little lark
Soars above our heads,
Carols blissfully !
Let us stand and gaze ;
Soon our eyes will meet,
(I will laugh to thee,
Thou wilt smile at me,
Wee Lidórushka !

300

310

“ Look, a beggar comes,
Trembling, weak, old man,
Give him what we can.
' Do not pray for us,'
Let us to him say,
' Father, you must pray
For Elyénushka,

For the lady fair,
Alexándrovna !

290
" Look, the church of God !
Sign the cross we twain
Time and time again. . . .
' Grant, O blessed Lord,
Thy most fair reward
To the gentle heart
Of Elyénushka,
Alexándrovna !'

300
" Green the forest grows,
Green the pretty fields,
In each dip and dell
Bright a mirror gleams.
Oh, how fair it is
In God's world to-day,
Glad my heart and gay !
Like the snowy swan
O'er the lake I sail,
O'er the waving steppes
Speeding like the quail.

330

310
" Here we are at home.
Through the door I fly
Like the pigeon grey ;
Low the family
Bow at sight of me,
Nearly to the ground,
Pardon they beseech
For the way in which
They have treated me.
' Sit you down,' I say,
' Do not bow to me.

340

Listen to my words :
You must bow to one
Better far than I,
Stronger far than I,
Sing your praise to her.'

350

" ' Sing to whom,' you say ?
' To Elyénushka,
To the fairest soul
God has sent on earth :
Alexándrovna ! ' "

CHAPTER VIII

THE WOMAN'S LEGEND

Matróna is silent.
You see that the peasants
Have seized the occasion—
They are not forgetting
To drink to the health
Of the beautiful lady !
But noticing soon
That Matróna is silent,
In file they approach her.

" What more will you tell us ? "

" What more ? " says Matróna.
" My fame as the ' lucky one '
Spread through the volost,
Since then they have called me
' The Governor's Lady.' "

350 You ask me, what further ?
I managed the household,
And brought up my children.

You ask, was I happy ?
Well, that you can answer
Yourself. And my children ?
Five sons ! But the peasant's
Misfortunes are endless :

They've robbed me of one."
She lowers her voice,
And her lashes are trembling,
But turning her head
She endeavours to hide it.

The peasants are rather
Confused, but they linger :
30 " Well, neighbour," they say,
" Will you tell us no more ? "

" There's one thing : You're foolish
To seek among women
For happiness, brothers."

" That's all ? "

" I can tell you
That twice we were swallowed
By fire, and that three times
The plague fell upon us :
40 But such things are common
To all of us peasants.
Like cattle we toiled,
My steps were as easy
As those of a horse
In the plough. But my troubles
Were not very startling :

No mountains have moved
From their places to crush me ;
And God did not strike me
With arrows of thunder.

59

The storm in my soul
Has been silent, unnoticed,
So how can I paint it
To you ? O'er the Mother
Insulted and outraged,
The blood of her first-born
As o'er a crushed worm
Has been poured ; and unanswered

60

The deadly offences
That many have dealt her ;
The knout has been raised
Unopposed o'er her body.

But one thing I never
Have suffered : I told you
That Sítnikov died,
That the last, irreparable
Shame had been spared me.
You ask me for happiness ?

70

Brothers, you mock me !
Go, ask the official,
The Minister mighty,
The Tsar—Little Father,
But never a woman !

God knows—among women
Your search will be endless,
Will lead to your graves.

“ A pious old woman
Once asked us for shelter ;
The whole of her lifetime
The Flesh she had conquered

80

50 By penance and fasting ;
She'd bathed in the Jordan,
And prayed at the tomb
Of Christ Jesus. She told us
The keys to the welfare
And freedom of women
Have long been mislaid—
God Himself has mislaid them.
And hermits, chaste women, 90
And monks of great learning,
Have sought them all over
The world, but not found them.
60 They're lost, and 'tis thought
By a fish they've been swallowed.
God's knights have been seeking
In towns and in deserts,
Weak, starving, and cold,
Hung with torturing fetters.
They've asked of the seers, 100
The stars they have counted
To learn ;—but no keys !
Through the world they have journeyed ;
70 In underground caverns,
In mountains, they've sought them.
At last they discovered
Some keys. They were precious,
But only—not ours.
Yet the warriors triumphed :
They fitted the lock 110
On the fetters of serfdom !
A sigh from all over
The world rose to Heaven,
A breath of relief,
80 Oh, so deep and so joyful !
Our keys were still missing. . . .

Great champions, though,
Till to-day are still searching,
Deep down in the bed
Of the ocean they wander,
They fly to the skies,
In the clouds they are seeking,
But never the keys.
Do you think they will find them?
Who knows? Who can say?
But I think it is doubtful,
For which fish has swallowed
Those treasures so priceless,
In which sea it swims—
God himself has forgotten!"

120

130

DEDICATED TO SERGE PETROVITCH BOTKIN

A FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

PROLOGUE

A VERY old willow
There is at the end
Of the village of "Earthworms,"
Where most of the folk
Have been diggers and delvers
From times very ancient
(Though some produced tar).
This willow had witnessed
The lives of the peasants :
Their holidays, dances,
Their communal meetings,
Their floggings by day,
In the evening their wooing,
And now it looked down
On a wonderful feast.

The feast was conducted
In Petersburg fashion,
For Klímka, the peasant

276 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

(Our former acquaintance),
Had seen on his travels 20
Some noblemen's banquets,
With toasts and orations,
And he had arranged it.

The peasants were sitting
On tree-trunks cut newly
For building a hut.
With them, too, our seven
(Who always were ready
To see what was passing)
Were sitting and chatting 30
With Vlass, the old Elder.
As soon as they fancied
A drink would be welcome,
The Elder called out
To his son, "Run for Trifon!"
With Trifon the deacon,
A jovial fellow,
A chum of the Elder's,
His sons come as well.

Two pupils they are 40
Of the clerical college
Named Sava and Grisha.
The former, the eldest,
Is nineteen years old.
He looks like a churchman
Already, while Grisha
Has fine, curly hair,
With a slight tinge of red,
And a thin, sallow face.
Both capital fellows 50
They are, kind and simple,

20 They work with the ploughshare,
The scythe, and the sickle,
Drink vodka on feast-days,
And mix with the peasants
Entirely as equals. . . .

The village lies close
To the banks of the Volga ;
A small town there is
On the opposite side. 60
(To speak more correctly,
There's now not a trace
Of the town, save some ashes :
A fire has demolished it
Two days ago.)

30 Some people are waiting
To cross by the ferry,
While some feed their horses
(All friends of the peasants).
Some beggars have crawled 70
To the spot ; there are pilgrims,
Both women and men ;
The women loquacious,
40 The men very silent.

The old Prince Yutiátin
Is dead, but the peasants
Are not yet aware
That instead of the hayfields
His heirs have bequeathed them
A long litigation. 80
So, drinking their vodka,
They first of all argue
50 Of how they'll dispose
Of the beautiful hayfields.

You were not all cozened,¹
 You people of Russia,
 And robbed of your land.
 In some blessed spots
 You were favoured by fortune !
 By some lucky chance —
 The Pomyëshchick's long absence,
 Some slip of posrédnik's,
 By wiles of the commune,
 You managed to capture
 A slice of the forest.
 How proud are the peasants
 In such happy corners !
 The Elder may tap
 At the window for taxes,
 The peasant will bluster,— 100
 One answer has he :
 " Just sell off the forest,
 And don't bother me ! "

So now, too, the peasants
 Of " Earthworms " decided
 To part with the fields
 To the Elder for taxes.
 They calculate closely :
 " They'll pay both the taxes
 And dues—with some over. 110
 Heh, Vlásuchka, won't they ? "

" Once taxes are paid
 I'll uncover to no man.
 I'll work if it please me,

¹ A reference to the arranging of terms between the Pomyëshchicks and peasants with regard to land at the time of the emancipation of the serfs.

I'll lie with my wife,
Or I'll go to the tavern."
"Bravo!" cry the peasants,
In answer to Klímka,
"Now, Vlásuchka, do you
Agree to our plan?"

120

"The speeches of Klímka
Are short, and as plain
As the public-house signboard,"
Says Vlásuchka, joking.
"And that is his manner:
To start with a woman
And end in the tavern."

"Well, where should one end, then?
Perhaps in the prison?
Now—as to the taxes,
Don't croak, but decide."

130

But Vlásuchka really
Was far from a croaker.
The kindest soul living
Was he, and he sorrowed
For all in the village,
Not only for one.
His conscience had pricked him
While serving his haughty
And rigorous Barin,
Obeying his orders,
So cruel and oppressive.
While young he had always
Believed in 'improvements,'
But soon he observed
That they ended in nothing,

140

280 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

Or worse—in misfortune.

So now he mistrusted
The new, rich in promise.

The wheels that have passed
O'er the roadways of Moscow
Are fewer by far

150

Than the injuries done
To the soul of the peasant.

There's nothing to laugh at
In that, so the Elder

Perforce had grown gloomy.
But now, the gay pranks
Of the peasants of "Earthworms"

Affected him too.

160

His thoughts became brighter :
No taxes . . . no barschin . . .

No stick held above you.
Dear God, am I dreaming ?

Old Vlásuchka smiles. . . .
A miracle surely !

Like that, when the sun
From the splendour of Heaven
May cast a chance ray

In the depths of the forest :
The dew shines like diamonds,
The mosses are gilded.

170

" Drink, drink, little peasants !
Disport yourselves bravely ! "
'Twas gay beyond measure.

In each breast awakens
A wondrous new feeling,
As though from the depths
Of a bottomless gulf

On the crest of a wave,

180

They've been borne to the surface
To find there awaits them
A feast without end.

Another pail's started,
And, oh, what a clamour
Of voices arises,
And singing begins.

And just as a dead man's
Relations and friends

"If nothing but him
The funeral's over.

They have finished
Funeral banquet
Started to drown—
Over the vodka.

At the old willow,

One time before

"I shall be a man"

to the Pomyéshchicks.

They ask,

A to oblige them

By a song

Call the "Merry Song" to them

(They are not really

A song to the people :

The dead man's son Grisha

Had sung it them first.

But since the great day

When the Tsar, Little Father,

Had broken the chains

Of his suffering children,

190

200

210

They always had danced
 To this tune on the feast-days.
 The " popes " and the house-serfs
 Could sing the words also,
 The peasants could not,
 But whenever they heard it
 They whistled and stamped,
 And the " Merry Song " called it.)

CHAPTER I

BITTER TIMES—BITTER SONG.

The Merry Song

* * * * *

The " Merry Song " finished,
 They struck up a chorus,
 A song of their own,
 A wailing lament
 (For, as yet, they've no others).
 And is it not strange
 That in vast Holy Russia,
 With masses and masses
 Of people unnumbered,
 No song has been born
 Overflowing with joy
 Like a bright summer morning ?
 Yes, is it not striking,
 And is it not tragic ?
 O times that are coming,
 You, too, will be painted
 In songs of the people.

BITTER TIMES -BITTER SONGS 283

But how? In what colours?
 And will there be ever
 A smile in their hearts? 20

"Eh, that's a fine song!
 'Tis a shame to forget it."

Our peasants regret
 That their memories trick them.
 And, meanwhile, the peasants
 Of "Earthworms" are saying,
 "We lived but for 'barschin,'
 Pray, how would you like it?"

You see, we grew up
 'Neath the snout of the Barin, 30
 Our noses were glued
 To the earth. We'd forgotten
 The faces of neighbours,
 Forgot how to speak.
 We got tipsy in silence,
 Gave kisses in silence,
 Fought silently, too."

"Eh, who speaks of silence?
 We'd more cause to hate it
 Than you," said a peasant 40
 Who came from a Volost
 Near by, with a waggon
 Of hay for the market.

(Some heavy misfortune
 Had forced him to sell it.)

"For once our young lady,
 Miss Gertrude, decided

That any one swearing
 Must soundly be flogged.

Dear Lord, how they flogged us 50
 Until we stopped swearing!

284 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

Of course, not to swear
 For the peasant means—silence.
 We suffered, God knows !
 Then freedom was granted.
 We feasted it finely,
 And then we made up
 For our silence, believe me :
 We swore in such style
 That Pope John was ashamed 60
 For the church-bells to hear us.
 (They rang all day long.)
 What stories we told then !
 We'd no need to seek
 For the words. They were written
 All over our backs."

" A funny thing happened
 In our parts,—a strange thing,"
 Remarked a tall fellow
 With bushy black whiskers. 70
 (He wore a round hat
 With a badge, a red waistcoat
 With ten shining buttons,
 And stout homespun breeches.
 His legs, to contrast
 With the smartness above them,
 Were tied up in rags !
 There are trees very like him,
 From which a small shepherd
 Has stripped all the bark off 80
 Below, while above
 Not a scratch can be noticed !
 And surely no raven
 Would scorn such a summit
 For building a nest.)

" Well, tell us about it."

" I'll first have a smoke."

And while he is smoking
Our peasants are asking,

" And who is this fellow ?
What sort of a goose ? "

90

" An unfortunate footman
Inscribed in our Volost,

A martyr, a house-serf
Of Count Sinegúsin's.

His name is Vikénti.

He sprang from the foot-board
Direct to the ploughshare ;

We still call him ' Footman.'

He's healthy enough,

100

But his legs are not strong,
And they're given to trembling.

His lady would drive

In a carriage and four

To go hunting for mushrooms.

He'll tell you some stories :

His memory's splendid ;

You'd think he had eaten

The eggs of a magpie."¹

Now, setting his hat straight,

110

Vikénti commences

To tell them the story.

¹ There is a Russian superstition that a good memory is gained by eating magpies' eggs.

The Dutiful Serf—Jacob the Faithful

Once an official, of rather low family,
Bought a small village from bribes he had
stored,
Lived in it thirty-three years without leaving it,
Feasted and hunted and drank like a lord.
Greedy and miserly, not many friends he
made,

Sometimes he'd drive to his sister's to tea.
Cruel was his nature, and not to his serfs
alone :

On his own daughter no pity had he, 120
Horsewhipped her husband, and drove them
both penniless

Out of his house ; not a soul dare resist.

Jacob, his dutiful servant,

Ever of orders observant,

Often he'd strike in the mouth with his fist.

Hearts of men born into slavery

Sometimes with dogs' hearts accord :

Crueller the punishments dealt to them

More they will worship their lord. 120

Jacob, it seems, had a heart of that quality,

Only two sources of joy he possessed :

Tending and serving his Barin devotedly,

Rocking his own little nephew to rest.

So they lived on till old age was approaching
them,

Weak grew the legs of the Barin at last,

Vainly, to cure them, he tried every remedy :

Feast and debauch were delights of the past.

Plump are his hands and white,
 Keen are his eyes and bright,
 Rosy his cheek remains, 140
 But on his legs—are chains !

Helpless the Barin now lies in his dressing-
 gown,

Bitterly, bitterly cursing his fate.

Jacob, his "brother and friend,"—so the
 Barin says,—

Nurses him, humours him early and late.

Winter and summer they pass thus in company,

Mostly at card-games together they play,

Sometimes they drive for a change to the
 sister's house,

Eight miles or so, on a very fine day.

Jacob himself bears his lord to the carriage
 then, 150

Drives him with care at a moderate pace,

Carries him into the old lady's drawing-
 room. . . .

So they live peacefully on for a space.

Grisha, the nephew of Jacob, a youth becomes,
 Falls at the feet of his lord : "I would
 wed."

"Who will the bride be ?" "Her name is
 Arisha, sir."

Thunders the Barin, "You'd better be
 dead !"

Looking at her he had often bethought himself,

"Oh, for my legs ! Would the Lord but
 relent !" 159

So, though the uncle entreated his clemency,

Grisha to serve in the army he sent.

Cut to the heart was the slave by this tyranny,
Jacob the Faithful went mad for a spell :
Drank like a fish, and his lord was disconsolate,
No one could please him : " You fools, go
to Hell ! "

Hate in each bosom since long has been
festering :

Now for revenge ! Now the Barin must pay,
Roughly they deal with his whims and infirmities,

Two quite unbearable weeks pass away.
Then the most faithful of servants appeared
again, 170

Straight at the feet of his master he fell,
Pity has softened his heart to the legless one,
Who can look after the Barin so well ?

" Barin, recall not your pitiless cruelty,
While I am living my cross I'll embrace."
Peacefully now lies the lord in his dressing-
gown,

Jacob, once more, is restored to his place.
Brother again the Pomyéshchick has christened
him.

" Why do you wince, little Jacob ? " says he.
" Barin, there's something that stings . . . in
my memory. . . . " 180

Now they thread mushrooms, play cards,
and drink tea,
Then they make brandy from cherries and
raspberries,

Next for a drive to the sister's they start,
See how the Barin lies smoking contentedly,
Green leaves and sunshine have gladdened
his heart.

Jacob is gloomy, converses unwillingly,

Trembling his fingers, the reins are hung
 slack,
 "Spirits unholy!" he murmurs unceasingly,
 "Leave me! Begone!" (But again they
 attack.)

Just on the right lies a deep, wooded precipice,
 Known in those parts as "The Devil's
 Abyss,"

191

Jacob turns into the wood by the side of it.

Queries his lord, "What's the meaning of
 this?"

Jacob replies not. The path here is difficult,
 Branches and ruts make their steps very slow;
 Rustling of trees is heard. Spring waters
 noisily

Cast themselves into the hollow below.

Then there's a halt,—not a step can the horses
 move:

Straight in their path stand the pines like
 a wall;

Jacob gets down, and, the horses unharnessing,
 Takes of the Barin no notice at all.

201

Vainly the Barin's exclaiming and questioning,
 Jacob is pale, and he shakes like a leaf,
 Evilly smiles at entreaties and promises:

"Am I a murderer, then, or a thief?"

No, Barin, *you* shall not die. There's another
 way!"

Now he has climbed to the top of a pine,
 Fastened the reins to the summit, and crossed
 himself,

Turning his face to the sun's bright decline.
 Thrusting his head in the noose . . . he has
 hanged himself!

210

Horrible ! Horrible ! See, how he sways
 Backwards and forwards. . . . The Barin,
 unfortunate,
 Shouts for assistance, and struggles and
 prays.
 Twisting his head he is jerking convulsively,
 Straining his voice to the utmost he cries,
 All is in vain, there is no one to rescue him,
 Only the mischievous echo replies.

Gloomy the hollow now lies in its winding-
 sheet,
 Black is the night. Hear the owls on the
 wing,
 Striking the earth as they pass, while the horses
 stand 220
 Chewing the leaves, and their bells faintly
 ring.
 Two eyes are burning like lamps at the train's
 approach,
 Steadily, brightly they gleam in the night,
 Strange birds are flitting with movements
 mysterious,
 Somewhere at hand they are heard to alight.
 Straight over Jacob a raven exultingly
 Hovers and caws. Now a hundred fly round !
 Feebly the Barin is waving his crutch at them,
 Merciful Heaven, what horrors abound !

So the poor Barin all night in the carriage lies.
 Shouting, from wolves to protect his old
 bones. 231
 Early next morning a hunter discovers him.
 Carries him home, full of penitent groans :

"Oh, I'm a sinner most infamous! Punish me!"

Barin, I think, till you rest in your grave,
One figure surely will haunt you incessantly,
Jacob the Faithful, your dutiful slave.

"What sinners! What sinners!"

The peasants are saying,

"I'm sorry for Jacob, 240

Yet pity the Barin,

Indeed he was punished!

Ah, me!" Then they listen

To two or three more tales

As strange and as fearful,

And hotly they argue

On who must be reckoned

The greatest of sinners:

"The publican," one says,

And one, "The Pomyéshchick," 250

Another, "The peasant."

This last was a carter,

A man of good standing

And sound reputation,

No ignorant babbler.

He'd seen many things

In his life, his own province

Had traversed entirely.

He should have been heard.

The peasants, however, 260

Were all so indignant

They would not allow him

To speak. As for Klímka,

His wrath is unbounded,

"You fool!" he is shouting.

"But let me explain."

" I see you are *all* fools,"
A voice remarks roughly :
The voice of a trader
Who squeezes the peasants
For laputs or berries
Or any spare trifles.

270

But chiefly he's noted
For seizing occasions
When taxes are gathered,
And peasants' possessions
Are bartered at auction.

" You start a discussion
And miss the chief point.

Why, who's the worst sinner ?
Consider a moment."

280

" Well, who then ? You tell us."

" The robber, of course."

" You've not been a serf, man,"
Says Klímka in answer ;

" The burden was heavy,
But not on your shoulders.

Your pockets are full,
So the robber alarms you ;
The robber with this case
Has nothing to do."

290

" The case of the robber
Defending the robber,"
The other retorts.

" Now, pray ! " bellows Klímka,
And leaping upon him,
He punches his jaw.

JACOB THE FAITHFUL

293

270 The trader repays him
With buffets as hearty,
"Take leave of your carcase!" 300
He roars.

"Here's a tussle!"
The peasants are clearing
A space for the battle;
They do not prevent it
Nor do they applaud it.
The blows fall like hail.

280 "I'll kill you, I'll kill you!
Write home to your parents!"

"I'll kill you, I'll kill you! 310
Heh, send for the pope!"

The trader, bent double
By Klimka, who, clutching
His hair, drags his head down,
Repeating, "He's bowing!"
Cries, "Stop, that's enough!"
When Klimka has freed him
He sits on a log,
And says, wiping his face
With a broadly-checked muffler, 320
"No wonder he conquered:
He ploughs not, he reaps not,
Does nothing but doctor
The pigs and the horses;
Of course he gets strong!"

The peasants are laughing,
And Klimka says, mocking.
"Here, try a bit more!"

294 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

"Come on, then! I'm ready,"

The trader says stoutly,
And rolling his sleeves up,
He spits on his palms.

330

"The hour has now sounded
For me, though a sinner,
To speak and unite you,"

Ióna pronounces.

The whole of the evening
That diffident pilgrim
Has sat without speaking,
And crossed himself, sighing.
The trader's delighted,
And Klímka replies not.
The rest, without speaking,
Sit down on the ground.

340

CHAPTER II

PILGRIMS AND WANDERERS

We know that in Russia
Are numbers of people
Who wander at large
Without kindred or home.
They sow not, they reap not,
They feed at the fountain
That's common to all,
That nourishes likewise
The tiniest mouse
And the mightiest army:
The sweat of the peasant.

10

330

The peasants will tell you
That whole populations
Of villages sometimes
Turn out in the autumn
To wander like pilgrims.
They beg, and esteem it
A paying profession.
The people consider
That misery drives them
More often than cunning,
And so to the pilgrims
Contribute their mite.

20

340

Of course, there are cases
Of downright deception :
One pilgrim's a thief,
Or another may wheedle
Some cloth from the wife
Of a peasant, exchanging
Some " sanctified wafers " 30
Or " tears of the Virgin "

He's brought from Mount Athos,
And then she'll discover
He's been but as far
As a cloister near Moscow.

One saintly old greybeard
Enraptured the people
By wonderful singing,
And offered to teach

The young girls of the village 40
The songs of the church

With their mothers' permission.
And all through the winter

He locked himself up
With the girls in a stable.

From thence, sometimes singing

Was heard, but more often
 Came laughter and giggles.
 Well, what was the upshot ?
 He taught them no singing,
 But ruined them all.

50

Some Masters so skilful
 There are, they will even
 Lay siege to the ladies.
 They first to the kitchens
 Make sure of admission,
 And then through the maids
 Gained access to the mistress.
 See, there he goes, strutting
 Along through the courtyard
 And jingling the keys
 Of the house like a Barin.
 And soon he will spit
 In the teeth of the peasants ;
 The pious old women,
 Who always before
 At the house have been welcome,
 He'll speedily banish.
 The people, however,
 Can see in these pilgrims
 A good side as well.
 For, who begs the money
 For building the churches ?
 And who keeps the convent's
 Collecting-box full ?
 And many, though useless,
 Are perfectly harmless ;
 But some are uncanny,
 One can't understand them :
 The people know Fóma.

60

70

80

50 With chains round his middle
Some six stones in weight ;
How summer and winter
He walks about barefoot,
And constantly mutters
Of Heaven knows what.
His life, though, is godly :
A stone for his pillow,
A crust for his dinner.

60 The people know also
The old man, Nikífor,
Adherent, most strange,
Of the sect called "The Hiders."
One day he appeared
In Usólovo village
Upbraiding the people
For lack of religion,
And calling them forth
To the great virgin forest
To seek for salvation.
70 The chief of police
Of the district just happened
To be in the village
And heard his oration :
"Ho ! Question the madman !"

"Thou foe of Christ Jesus !
Thou Antichrist's herald !"
Nikífor retorts.

The Elders are nudging him :

"Now, then, be silent !"

80 He pays no attention.

They drag him to prison.

He stands in the waggon,

90

100

110

298 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

Undauntedly chiding
The chief of police,
And loudly he cries
To the people who follow him :

“ Woe to you ! Woe to you ! Bondsmen, I
mourn for you !
Though you're in rags, e'en the rags shall be
torn from you !
Fiercely with knouts in the past did they
mangle you : 120
Clutches of iron in the future will strangle
you ! ”

The people are crossing
Themselves. The Nachálnik ¹
Is striking the prophet :
“ Remember the Judge
Of Jerusalem, sinner ! ”
The driver's so frightened
The reins have escaped him,
His hair stands on end. . . .

And when will the people 130
Forget Yevressina,
Miraculous widow ?
Let cholera only
Break out in a village :
At once like an envoy
Of God she appears.
She nurses and fosters
And buries the peasants.
The women adore her,
They pray to her almost. 140

¹ Chief of Police.

It's evident, then,

That the door of the peasant

Is easily opened :

Just knock, and be certain

He'll gladly admit you.

He's never suspicious

Like wealthier people :

The thought does not strike him

At sight of the humble

And destitute stranger,

150

" Perhaps he's a thief ! "

And as to the women,

They're simply delighted,

They'll welcome you warmly.

At night, in the Winter,

The family gathered

To work in the cottage

By light of " luchina," ¹

Are charmed by the pilgrim's

Remarkable stories.

160

He's washed in the steam-bath,

And dipped with his spoon

In the family platter,

First blessing its contents.

His veins have been thawed

By a streamlet of vodka,

His words flow like water.

The hut is as silent

As death. The old father

Was mending the laputs,

170

But now he has dropped them.

¹ A wooden splinter prepared and used for lighting purposes.

300 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

The song of the shuttle
Is hushed, and the woman
Who sits at the wheel
Is engrossed in the story.

The daughter, Yevgénka,
Her plump little finger
Has pricked with a needle.
The blood has dried up,

But she notices nothing ; 180
Her sewing has fallen,
Her eyes are distended,
Her arms hanging limp.

The children, in bed
On the sleeping-planks, listen,
Their heads hanging down.

They lie on their stomachs
Like snug little seals
Upon Archangel ice-blocks.

Their hair, like a curtain, 190
Is hiding their faces :
It's yellow, of course !

But wait. Soon the pilgrim
Will finish his story—
(It's true)—from Mount Athos.

It tells how that sinner
The Turk had once driven
Some monks in rebellion
Right into the sea,—

Who meekly submitted, 200
And perished in hundreds.

(What murmurs of horror
Arise ! Do you notice
The eyes, full of tears ?)

And now comes the climax,
The terrible moment,
And even the mother
Has loosened her hold
On the corpulent bobbin.
It rolls to the ground. . . . 210
And see how cat Vaska
At once becomes active
And pounces upon it.
At times less enthralling
The antics of Vaska
Would meet their deserts ;
But now he is patting
And touching the bobbin
And leaping around it
With flexible movements, 220
And no one has noticed.
It rolls to a distance,
The thread is unwound.

Whoever has witnessed
The peasant's delight
At the tales of the pilgrims
Will realise this :
Though never so crushing
His labours and worries,
Though never so pressing 230
The call of the tavern,
Their weight will not deaden
The soul of the peasant
And will not benumb it.
The road that's before him
Is broad and unending. . . .
When old fields, exhausted,
Play false to the reaper,

302 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

He'll seek near the forest
 For soil more productive. 240
 The work may be hard,
 But the new plot repays him :
 It yields a rich harvest
 Without being manured.
 A soil just as fertile
 Lies hid in the soul
 Of the people of Russia :
 O Sower, then come !

The pilgrim Ióna
 Since long is well known 250
 In the village of "Earthworms."
 The peasants contend
 For the honour of giving
 The holy man shelter.
 At last, to appease them,
 He'd say to the women,
 "Come, bring out your icons !"
 They'd hurry to fetch them.
 Ióna, prostrating
 Himself to each icon, 260
 Would say to the people,
 "Dispute not ! Be patient,
 And God will decide :
 The saint who looks kindest
 At me I will follow."
 And often he'd follow
 The icon most poor
 To the lowliest hovel.
 That hut would become then
 A Cup overflowing ; 270
 The women would run there

With baskets and saucepans,
All thanks to Ióna.

And now, without hurry
Or noise, he's beginning
To tell them a story,
"Two Infamous Sinners."
But first, most devoutly,
He crosses himself.

Two Infamous Sinners

Come, let us praise the Omnipotent ! 280
Let us the legend relate
Told by a monk in the Priory.
Thus did I hear him narrate :

Once were twelve brigands notorious,
One, Kudeár, at their head ;
Torrents of blood of good Christians
Foully the miscreants shed.

Deep in the forest their hiding-place,
Rich was their booty and rare ;
Once Kudeár from near Kiev Town 290
Stole a young maiden most fair.

Days Kudeár with his mistress spent,
Nights on the road with his horde ;
Suddenly, conscience awoke in him,
Stirred by the grace of the Lord.

Sleep left his couch. Of iniquity
Sickened his spirit at last ;
Shades of his victims appeared to him,
Crowding in multitudes vast.

304 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

Long was this monster most obdurate, 300
Blind to the light from above,
Then flogged to death his chief satellite,
Cut off the head of his love,—

Scattered his gang in his penitence,
And to the churches of God
All his great riches distributed,
Buried his knife in the sod,

Journeyed on foot to the Sepulchre,
Filled with repentance and grief;
Wandered and prayed, but the pilgrimage
Brought to his soul no relief. 311

When he returned to his Fatherland
Clad like a monk, old and bent,
'Neath a great oak, as an anchorite,
Life in the forest he spent.

There, from the Maker Omnipotent,
Grace day and night did he crave:
“Lord, though my body thou castigate,
Grant that my soul I may save!”

Pity had God on the penitent, 320
Showed him the pathway to take,
Sent His own messenger unto him
During his prayers, who thus spake:

“Know, for this oak sprang thy preference,
Not without promptings divine;
Lo! take the knife thou hast slaughtered with,
Fell it, and grace shall be thine.

300

" Yea, though the task prove laborious,
Great shall the recompense be,
Let but the tree fall, and verily
Thou from thy load shalt be free."

330

Vast was the giant's circumference ;
Praying, his task he begins,
Works with the tool of atrociousness,
Offers amends for his sins.

Glory he sang to the Trinity,
Scraped the hard wood with his blade.
Years passed away. Though he tarried not,
Slow was the progress he made.

311

'Gainst such a mighty antagonist
How could he hope to prevail ?
Only a Samson could vanquish it,
Not an old man, spent and frail.

340

Doubt, as he worked, began plaguing him :
Once of a voice came the sound,
" Heh, old man, say what thy purpose is ? "
Crossing himself he looked round.

There, Pan ¹ Glukhóvsky was watching him
On his brave Arab astride,
Rich was the Pan, of high family,
Known in the whole countryside.

320

350

Many cruel deeds were ascribed to him,
Filled were his subjects with hate,
So the old hermit to caution him
Told him his own sorry fate.

nce,

with,

¹ Polish title for nobleman or gentleman.

306 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

“ Ho ! ” laughed Glukhóvsky, derisively,
“ Hope of salvation’s not mine ;
These are the things that I estimate—
Women, gold, honour, and wine.

“ My life, old man, is the only one ; 360
Many the serfs that I keep ;
What though I waste, hang, and torture them—
You should but see how I sleep ! ”

Lo ! to the hermit, by miracle,
Wrath a great strength did impart,
Straight on Glukhóvsky he flung himself,
Buried the knife in his heart.

Scarce had the Pan, in his agony,
Sunk to the blood-sodden ground,
Crashed the great tree, and lay subjugate,
Trembled the earth at the sound. 371

Lo ! and the sins of the anchorite
Passed from his soul like a breath.
“ Let us pray God to incline to us,
Slaves in the shadow of Death. . . . ”

CHAPTER III

OLD AND NEW

Ióna has finished.
He crosses himself,
And the people are silent.
And then of a sudden

The trader cries loudly
In great irritation,
"What's wrong with the ferry?
A plague on the sluggards!
Ho, ferry ahoy!"

"You won't get the ferry
Till sunrise, for even
In daytime they're frightened
To cross: the boat's rotten!
About Kudeár, now—"

"Ho, ferry ahoy!"

He strides to his waggon.
A cow is there tethered:
He churlishly kicks her.
His hens begin clucking;
He shouts at them, "Silence!"
The calf, which is shifting
About in the cart,

Gets a crack on the forehead.
He strikes the roan mare
With the whip, and departing
He makes for the Volga.

The moon is now shining,
It casts on the roadway
A comical shadow,
Which trots by his side.

"Oho!" says the Elder,
"He thought himself able
To fight, but discussion
Is not in his line. . . .
My brothers, how grievous
The sins of the nobles!"

"And yet not as great
As the sin of the peasant,"
The carter cannot here
Refrain from remarking. 4'

"A plaguey old croaker!"
Says Klím, spitting crossly;
"Whatever arises
The raven must fly
To his own little brood!
What is it, then, tell us,
The sin of the peasant?"

The Sin of Gleb the Peasant

A'miral Widower sailed on the sea,
Steering his vessels a-sailing went he. 40
Once with the Turk a great battle he fought,
His was the victory, gallantly bought.
So to the hero as valour's reward
Eight thousand souls¹ did the Empress
award.

A'miral Widower lived on his land
Rich and content, till his end was at hand.
As he lay dying this A'miral bold
Handed his Elder a casket of gold.
"See that thou cherish this casket," he said,
"Keep it and open it when I am dead.
There lies my will, and by it you will see
Eight thousand souls are from serfdom set
free." 61

Dead, on the table, the A'miral lies,
A kinsman remote to the funeral hies.

¹ Serfs.

Buried ! Forgotten ! His relative soon
 Calls Gleb, the Elder, with him to commune.
 And, in a trice, by his cunning and skill,
 4' Learns of the casket, and terms of the will.
 Offers him riches and bliss unalloyed,
 Gives him his freedom,—the will is destroyed !
 Thus, by Gleb's longing for criminal gains,
 Eight thousand souls were left rotting in
 chains, 71
 Aye, and their sons and their grandsons as well,
 Think, what a crowd were thrown back into
 Hell !

God forgives all. Yes, but Judas's crime
 Ne'er will be pardoned till end of all time.
 Peasant, most infamous sinner of all,
 Endlessly grieve to atone for thy fall !

49 Wrathful, relentless,
 The carter thus finished
 The tale of the peasant 80
 In thunder-like tones.
 The others sigh deeply
 And rise. They're exclaiming.
 "So, that's what it is, then,
 The sin of the peasant.
 He's right. 'Tis indeed
 A most terrible sin !"

said,
 d.
 ee
 om set
 61
 "The story speaks truly ;
 Our grief shall be endless,
 Ah, me !" says the Elder. 90
 (His faith in improvements
 Has vanished again.)
 And Klímka, who always
 Is swayed in an instant
 By joy or by sorrow,

310 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

Despondingly echoes,
"A terrible sin !"

The green by the Volga,
Now flooded with moonlight,
Has changed of a sudden : 100
The peasants no longer
Seem men independent
With self-assured movements,
They're "Earthworms" again—
Those "Earthworms" whose victuals
Are never sufficient,
Who always are threatened
With drought, blight, or famine,
Who yield to the trader 110
The fruits of extortion,
Their tears, shed in tar.
The miserly haggler
Not only ill-pays them,
But bullies as well :
"For what do I pay you ?
The tar costs you nothing.
The sun brings it oozing
From out of your bodies
As though from a pine."

Again the poor peasants 120
Are sunk in the depths
Of the bottomless gulf !
Dejected and silent,
They lie on their stomachs
Absorbed in reflection.
But then they start singing ;
And slowly the song,
Like a ponderous cloud-bank,

THE HUNGRY ONE

311

Rolls mournfully onwards,
 They sing it so clearly
 That quickly our seven
 Have learnt it as well.

130

The Hungry One

The peasant stands
 With haggard gaze,
 He pants for breath,
 He reels and sways ;

From famine food,
 From bread of bark,
 His form has swelled,
 His face is dark.

140

Through endless grief
 Suppressed and dumb
 His eyes are glazed,
 His soul is numb.

As though in sleep,
 With footsteps slow,
 He creeps to where
 The rye doth grow.

Upon his field
 He gazes long,
 He stands and sings
 A voiceless song :

150

" Grow ripe, grow ripe,
 O Mother rye,
 I fostered thee,
 Thy lord am I.

312 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

“Yield me a loaf
Of monstrous girth,
A cake as vast
As Mother-Earth.

160

“I’ll eat the whole—
No crumb I’ll spare;
With wife, with child,
I will not share.”

“Eh, brothers, I’m hungry!”
A voice exclaims feebly.
It’s one of the peasants.
He fetches a loaf
From his bag, and devours it.

“They sing without voices,
And yet when you listen
Your hair begins rising,”
Another remarks.

170

It’s true. Not with voices
They sing of the famine—
But something within them.
One, during the singing,
Has risen, to show them
The gait of the peasant
Exhausted by hunger,
And swayed by the wind.
Restrained are his movements
And slow. After singing
“The Hungry One,” thirsting
They make for the bucket,
One after another
Like geese in a file.
They stagger and totter

180

As people half-famished,
A drink will restore them.

190

"Come, let us be joyful!"

The deacon is saying.

His youngest son, Grísha,

Approaches the peasants.

"Some vodka?" they ask him.

"No, thank you. I've had some.

But what's been the matter?

You look like drowned kittens."

"What should be the matter?"

(And making an effort

200

They bear themselves bravely.)

And Vlass, the old Elder,

Has placed his great palm

On the head of his godson.

"Is serfdom revived?

Will they drive you to barschin

Or pilfer your hayfields?"

Says Grísha in jest.

"The hay-fields? You're joking!"

"Well, what has gone wrong, then?

And why were you singing

211

'The Hungry One,' brothers?

To summon the famine?"

"Yes, what's all the pother?"

Here Klímka bursts out

Like a cannon exploding.

The others are scratching

160

170

180

314 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

Their necks, and reflecting :
 " It's true ! What's amiss ? "
 " Come, drink, little ' Earthworms,'
 Come, drink and be merry ! 221
 All's well—as we'd have it,
 Aye, just as we wished it.
 Come, hold up your noddles !
 But what about Gleb ? "

A lengthy discussion
 Ensues ; and it's settled
 That they're not to blame
 For the deed of the traitor :
 'Twas serfdom's the fault. 230
 For just as the big snake
 Gives birth to the small ones,
 So serfdom gave birth
 To the sins of the nobles,
 To Jacob the Faithful's
 And also to Gleb's.
 For, see, without serfdom
 Had been no Pomyéshchick
 To drive his true servant
 To death by the noose, 240
 No terrible vengeance
 Of slave upon master
 By suicide fearful,
 No treacherous Gleb.

'Twas Prov of all others
 Who listened to Grisha
 With deepest attention
 And joy most apparent.
 And when he had finished
 He cried to the others 250
 In accents of triumph,

Delightedly smiling,

"Now, brothers, mark *that* !"

"So now, there's an end

Of 'The Hungry One,' peasants !"

Cries Klímka, with glee.

The words about serfdom

Were quickly caught up

By the crowd, and went passing

From one to another :

260

"Yes, if there's no big snake

There cannot be small ones !"

And Klímka is swearing

Again at the carter :

"You ignorant fool !"

They're ready to grapple !

The deacon is sobbing

And kissing his Grísha :

"Just see what a headpiece

The Lord is creating !

270

No wonder he longs

For the college in Moscow !"

Old Vlass, too, is patting

His shoulder and saying,

"May God send thee silver

And gold, and a healthy

And diligent wife !"

"I wish not for silver

Or gold," replies Grísha.

"But one thing I wish :

280

I wish that my comrades,

Yes, all the poor peasants

In Russia so vast,

Could be happy and free !"

Thus, earnestly speaking,

250

316 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

And blushing as shyly
As any young maiden,
He walks from their midst.

The dawn is approaching.
The peasants make ready 290
To cross by the ferry.
"Eh, Vlass," says the carter,
As, stooping, he raises
The span of his harness,
"Who's this on the ground?"

The Elder approaches,
And Klímka behind him,
Our seven as well.
(They're always most anxious
To see what is passing.) 300

Some fellow is lying
Exhausted, dishevelled,
Asleep, with the beggars
Behind some big logs.
His clothing is new,
But it's hanging in ribbons.
A crimson silk scarf
On his neck he is wearing;
A watch and a waistcoat;
His blouse, too, is red. 310
Now Klímka is stooping
To look at the sleeper,
Shouts, "Beat him!" and roughly
Stamps straight on his mouth.

The fellow springs up,
Rubs his eyes, dim with sleep,
And old Vlásuchka strikes him.

THE HUNGRY ONE

317

He squeals like a rat
'Neath the heel of your slipper,
And makes for the forest 320
On long, lanky legs.
Four peasants pursue him.
The others cry, "Beat him!"
Until both the man
And the band of pursuers
Are lost in the forest.

"Who is he?" our seven
Are asking the Elder,
"And why do they beat him?"

"We don't know the reason, 330
But we have been told
By the people of Tískov
To punish this Shútov
Whenever we catch him,
And so we obey.
When people from Tískov
Pass by, they'll explain it.
What luck? Did you catch him?"
He asks of the others
Returned from the chase. 340

"We caught him, I warrant,
And gave him a lesson.
He's run to Demyánsky,
For there he'll be able
To cross by the ferry."

"Strange people, to beat him
Without any cause!"

318 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

“ And why ? If the commune
Has told us to do it
There must be some reason ! ” 350

Shouts Klím at the seven.
“ D’you think that the people
Of Tiskov are fools ?

It isn’t long since, mind,
That many were flogged there,
One man in each ten.

Ah, Shútov, you rendered
A dastardly service,
Your duties are evil,
You damnable wretch ! 360

And who deserves beating
As richly as Shútov ?

Not we alone beat him :
From Tiskov, you know ,
Fourteen villages lie
On the banks of the Volga ;
I warrant through each
He’s been driven with blows.”

The seven are silent.
They’re longing to get 370
At the root of the matter.

But even the Elder
Is now growing angry.

It’s daylight. The women
Are bringing their husbands
Some breakfast, of rye-cakes
And—goose ! (For a peasant
Had driven some geese
Through the village to market,
And three were grown weary, 380

And had to be carried.)
 " See here, will you sell them ?
 They'll die ere you get there."
 And so, for a trifle,
 The geese had been bought.

We've often been told
 How the peasant loves drinking;
 Not many there are, though,
 Who know how he eats.

He's greedier far
 For his food than for vodka. 390

So one man to-day
 (A teetotaller mason)
 Gets perfectly drunk
 On his breakfast of goose !
 A shout ! " Who is coming ?
 Who's this ? " Here's another
 Excuse for rejoicing

And noise ! There's a hay-cart
 With hay, now approaching, 400
 And high on its summit
 A soldier is sitting.

He's known to the peasants
 For twenty versts round.

And, cosy beside him,
 Justínutchka sits

(His niece, and an orphan,
 His prop in old age).

He now earns his living
 By means of his peep-show, 410

Where, plainly discerned,
 Are the Kremlin and Moscow,

While music plays too.

The instrument once

320 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

Had gone wrong, and the soldier,
 No capital owning,
 Bought three metal spoons,
 Which he beat to make music ;
 But the words that he knew
 Did not suit the new music,
 And folk did not laugh.

420

The soldier was sly, though :
 He made some new words up
 That went with the music.

They hail him with rapture !
 " Good-health to you, Grandad !
 Jump down, drink some vodka,
 And give us some music."

" It's true I got *up* here,
 But how to get down ? "

430

" You're going, I see,
 To the town for your pension,
 But look what has happened :
 It's burnt to the ground."

" Burnt down ? Yes, and rightly !
 What then ? Then I'll go
 To St. Petersburg for it ;
 For all my old comrades
 Are there with their pensions,
 They'll show me the way."

440

" You'll go by the train, then ? "

The old fellow whistles :
 " Not long you've been serving
 Us, orthodox Christians,
 You, infidel railway !

And welcome you were
 When you carried us cheaply
 From Peters to Moscow.
 (It cost but three roubles.)
 But now you want seven,
 So, go to the devil !

450

" Lady so insolent, lady so arrogant !
 Hiss like a snake as you glide !
Fig for you ! Fig for you ! Fig for you ! Fig
for you !

Puff at the whole countryside !
 Crushing and maiming your toll you extort,
 Straight in the face of the peasant you snort,
 Soon all the people of Russia you may
 Cleaner than any big broom sweep away ! "

" Come, give us some music,"

460

Says Vlass to the soldier,

" For here there are plenty

Of holiday people,

"Twill be to your profit.

You see to it, Klímka ! "

(Though Vlass doesn't like him,

Whenever there's something

That calls for arranging

He leaves it to Klímka :

" You see to it, Klímka ! "

470

And Klímka is pleased.)

And soon the old soldier

Is helped from the hay-cart :

He's weak on his legs,—tall,

And strikingly thin.

His uniform seems

322 FEAST FOR THE WHOLE VILLAGE

To be hung from a pole ;
There are medals upon it.

It cannot be said
That his face is attractive, 480
Especially when
It's distorted by *tie* :
His mouth opens wide
And his eyes burn like charcoal.—
A regular demon !

The music is started,
The people run back
From the banks of the Volga.
He sings to the music.

* * * *

A spasm has seized him : 490
He leans on his niece,
And his left leg upraising
He twirls it around
In the air like a weight.
His right follows suit then,
And murmuring, " Curse it ! "
He suddenly masters
And stands on them both.

" You see to it, Klimka ! "
Of course he'll arrange it 500
In Petersburg fashion :
He stands them together,
The niece and the uncle ;
Takes two wooden dishes
And gives them one each,
Then springs on a tree-trunk
To make an oration.

(The soldier can't help
 Adding apt little words
 To the speech of the peasant,
 And striking his spoons.)

510

* * * * *

The soldier is stamping
 His feet. One can hear
 His dry bones knock together.
 When Klimka has finished
 The peasants come crowding,
 Surrounding the soldier,
 And some a kopéck give,
 And others give half :
 In no time a rouble
 Is piled on the dishes.

520

480

490

500

EPILOGUE

GRISHA DOBROSKLONOW

A CHEERFUL SEASON—CHILDE'S SONGS

THE feast was continued
Till morning—a splendid,
A wonderful feast !
Then the people dispersed
Home, and our peasants
Drove down 'neath the willow ;
A week pilgrim
I—slept there too.
And Grisha,
The sons of the deacon,
Went home, with their parent
Unsteady between them.
They sang ; and their voices,
Like bells on the Volga,
So loud and so tuneful,
Came chiming together :

“ Praise to the hero
Bringing the nation
Peace and salvation !

CHEERFUL SEASON

325

" That which will surely
Banish the night
He ¹ has awarded—
Freedom and Light !

20

" Praise to the hero
Bringing the nation
Peace and salvation !

" Blessings from Heaven,
Grace from above,
Rained on the battle,
Conquered by Love.

30

" Little we ask Thee
Grant us, O Lord,
Strength to be honest,
Fearing Thy word !

" Brotherly living,
Sharing in part,
That is the roadway
Straight to the heart.

" Turn from that teaching
Tender and wise—
Cowards and traitors
Soon will arise.

40

" People of Russia,
Banish the night !
You have been granted
That which is needful
Freedom and Light !

gave emancipation to the

The deacon was poor
 As the poorest of peasants :
 A mean little cottage 50
 Like two narrow cages,
 The one with an oven
 Which smoked, and the other
 For use in the summer,—
 Such was his abode.
 No horse he possessed
 And no cow. He had once had
 A dog and a cat,
 But they'd both of them left him.

His sons put him safely 60
 To bed, snoring loudly ;
 Then Sávushka opened
 A book, while his brother
 Went out, and away
 To the fields and the forest.

A broad-shouldered youth
 Was this Grísha ; his face, though,
 Was terribly thin.
 In the clerical college
 The students got little 70
 To eat. Sometimes Grísha
 Would lie the whole night
 Without sleep ; only longing
 For morning and breakfast.—
 The coarse piece of bread
 And the glassful of sbeeten.¹
 The village was poor
 And the food there was scanty,
 But still, the two brothers

¹ A popular Russian drink composed of hot water and honey.

CHEERFUL SEASON

327

Grew certainly plumper
When home for the holidays—
Thanks to the peasants.

80

The boys would repay them
By all in their power,
By work, or by doing
Their little commissions
In town. Though the deacon
Was proud of his children,
He never had given
Much thought to their feeding. 90
Himself, the poor deacon,
Was endlessly hungry,
His principal thought
Was the manner of getting
The next piece of food.
He was rather light-minded
And vexed himself little ;
But Dyómna, his wife,
Had been different entirely :
She worried and counted, 100
So God took her soon.
The whole of her life
She by salt ¹ had been troubled :
If bread has run short
One can ask of the neighbours ;
But salt, which means money,
Is hard to obtain.
The village with Dyómna
Had shared its bread freely ;
And long, long ago 110
Would her two little children

¹ There was a very heavy tax laid upon salt at the time.

Have I n in the churchyard
If not for the peasants.

And Dyónna was ready
To work without ceasing
For all who had helped her ;
But salt was her trouble.
Her thought, ever present.
She dreamt of it, sang of it,
Sleeping and waking, 120
While washing, while spinning,
At work in the fields,
While rocking her darling
Her favourite, Grísha.
And many years after
The death of his mother,
His heart would grow heavy
And sad, when the peasants
Remembered one song,
And would sing it together 130
As Dyómna had sung it ;
They called it " The Salt Song."

The Salt Song

Now none but God
Can save my son :
He's dying fast,
My little one. . . .

I give him bread—
He looks at it,
He cries to me,
" Put salt on it." 140

THE SALT SONG

329

I have no salt
No tiny grain,
"Take flour," God whispers,
"Try again. . . ."

He tastes it once,
Once more he tries;
"That's not enough,
More salt!" he cries.

The flour again. . .
My tears fall fast
Upon the bread,—
He eats at last!

The mother smiles
In pride and joy:
Her tears so salt
Have saved the boy.

* * * * *

Young Grisha remembered
This song; he would sing it
Quite low to himself
In the clerical college.

The college was cheerless,
And singing this song
He would yearn for his mother.
For home, for the peasants,

His friends and protectors.
And soon, with the love
Which he bore to his mother,
His love for the people

Grew wider and stronger. . . .
At fifteen years old
He was firmly decided

To spend his whole life
In promoting their welfare,
In striving to succour
The poor and afflicted.
The demon of malice
Too long over Russia
Has scattered its hate ;
The shadow of serfdom
Has hidden all paths
Save corruption and lying.
Another song now
Will arise throughout Russia ;
The angel of freedom
And mercy is flying
Unseen o'er our heads,
And is calling strong spirits
To follow the road
Which is honest and clean.

180

Oh, tread not the road
So shining and broad :
Along it there speed
With feverish tread
The multitudes led
By infamous greed.

190

There lives which are spent
With noble intent
Are mocked at in scorn ;
There souls lie in chains,
And bodies and brains
By passions are torn,

200

By animal thirst
For pleasures accurst
Which pass in a breath.

THE SALT SONG

331

There hope is in vain,
For there is the reign
Of darkness and death.

* * * *

In front of your eyes
Another road lies —
'Tis honest and clean.
Though steep it appears
And sorrow and tears
Upon it are seen :

210

It leads to the door
Of those who are poor,
Who hunger and thirst,
Who pant without air,
Who die in despair—
Oh, there be the first !

The song of the angel
Of Mercy not vainly
Was sung to our Grisha.
The years of his study
Being passed, he developed
In thought and in feeling ;
A passionate singer
Of Freedom became he,
Of all who are grieving,
Down-trodden, afflicted,
In Russia so vast.

220

230

The bright sun was shining,
The cool, fragrant morning
Was filled with the sweetness
Of newly-mown hay.

180

190

200

Young Grisha was thoughtful,
 He followed the first road
 He met—an old high-road,
 An avenue, shaded
 By tall curling birch trees.

The month was now gloomy, 240
 Now perceived the effect
 Of the past was still with him :
 His thoughts were at work,
 And in song he expressed them :

“ I know that you suffer,
 O Motherland dear,
 The thought of it fills me with woe :
 And Fate has much sorrow
 In store yet, I fear,
 But you will not perish, I know. 250

“ How long since your children
 As playthings were used,
 As slaves to base passions and lust ;
 Were bartered like cattle,
 Were vilely abused
 By masters most cruel and unjust ?

“ How long since young maidens
 Were dragged to their shame,
 Since whistle of whips filled the land,
 Since ‘ Service ’ possessed 260
 A more terrible fame
 Than death by the torturer’s hand ?

“ Enough ! It is finished,
 This tale of the past ;
 ‘Tis ended, the masters’ long sway ;

The strength of the people
Is stirring at last,
To freedom 'twill point them the way.

240 " Your burden grows lighter,
O Motherland dear, 270
Your wounds less appalling to see.
Your fathers were slaves,
Smitten helpless by fear,
But, Mother, your children are free ! "

A small winding footpath
Now tempted young Grisha,
And guided his steps
To a very broad hayfield.
250 The peasants were cutting
The hay, and were singing 280
His favourite song.

Young Grisha was saddened
By thoughts of his mother,
And nearly in anger
He hurried away
From the field to the forest.
Bright echoes are darting
About in the forest ;
Like quails in the wheat
Little children are romping 290

260 (The elder ones work
In the hayfields already).
He stopped awhile, seeking
For horse-chestnuts with them.
The sun was now hot :
To the river went Grisha
To bathe, and he had
A good view of the ruins

That three days before
Had been burnt. What a picture !
No house is left standing ; 301
And only the prison
Is saved ; just a few days
Ago it was whitewashed ;
It stands like a little
White cow in the pastures.
The guards and officials
Have made it their refuge ;
But all the poor peasants
Are strewn by the river 310
Like soldiers in camp.
Though they're mostly asleep now,
A few are astir,
And two under-officials
Are picking their way
To the tent for some vodka
'Mid tables and cupboards
And waggons and bundles.
A tailor approaches
The vodka tent also ; 320
A shrivelled old fellow.
His irons and his scissors
He holds in his hands,
Like a leaf he is shaking.
The pope has arisen
From sleep, full of prayers.
He is combing his hair ;
Like a girl he is holding
His long shining plait.
Down the Volga comes floating 330
Some wood-laden raft
And three ponderous barges
Are anchored beneath

THE BARGE-TOWER

335

301 The right bank of the river.
The barge-tower yesterday
Evening had dragged them
With songs to their places,
And there he is standing,
The poor harassed man !
He is looking quite gay though, 340
As if on a holiday,
Has a clean shirt on :
Some farthings are jingling
Aloud in his pocket.
Young Grisha observes him
For long from the river,
And, half to himself,
Half aloud, begins singing :

The Barge-Tower

320 With shoulders back and breast astrain,
And bathed in sweat which falls like rain,
Through midday heat with gasping song,
He drags the heavy barge along. 352
He falls and rises with a groan.
His song becomes a husky moan. . . .
But now the barge at anchor lies,
A giant's sleep has sealed his eyes ;
And in the bath at break of day
He drives the clinging sweat away.
Then leisurely along the quay
He strolls refreshed, and roubles three 360
Are sewn into his girdle wide ;
Some coppers jingle at his side.
He thinks awhile, and then he goes
Towards the tavern. There he throws

Some hard-earned farthings on the seat :
 He drinks, and revels in the treat,
 The sense of perfect ease and rest.
 Soon with the cross he signs his breast :
 The journey home begins to-day.
 And cheerfully he goes away ; 370
 On presents spends a coin or so :
 For wife some scarlet calico,
 A scarf for sister, tinsel toys
 For eager little girls and boys.
 God guide him home—'tis many a mile—
 And let him rest a little while. . . .

The barge-tower's fate
 Lead the thoughts of young Grisha
 To dwell on the whole
 Of mysterious Russia— 380
 The fate of her people.
 For long he was roving
 About on the bank,
 Feeling hot and excited,
 His brain overflowing
 With new and new verses.

Russia

"The Tsar was in mood
 To dabble in blood :
 To wage a great war.
 Shall we have gold enough ? 390
 Shall we have strength enough ?
 Questioned the Tsar.

“(Thou art so pitiful,
Poor, and so sorrowful,
Yet thou art powerful,
Thy wealth is plentiful,
Russia, my Mother !)

“ By misery chastened,
By serfdom of old.
The heart of thy people,
O Tsar, is of gold.

“ And strong were the nation.
Unyielding its might,
If standing for conscience,
For justice and right.

“ But summon the country
To valueless strife,
And no man will hasten
To offer his life.

“ So Russia lies sleeping
In obstinate rest ;—
But should the spark kindle
That’s hid in her breast—

“ She’ll rise without summons,
Go forth without call,
With sacrifice boundless,
Each giving his all !

“ A host she will gather
Of strength unsurpassed,
With infinite courage
Will fight to the last.

EPILOGUE

"(Thou art so pitiful,
 Poor and so sorrowful,
 Yet of great treasure full,
 Mighty, all-powerful,
 Russia, my Mother !)"

Young Grisha was pleased
 With his song ; and he murmured,
 " Its message is true ;
 I will sing it to-morrow 430
 Aloud to the peasants.

Their songs are so mournful,
 It's well they should hear
 Something joyful. —God help them !
 For just as with running

The cheeks begin burning,
 So acts a good song
 On the spirit despairing,
 Brings comfort and strength." 440
 But first to his brother
 He sang the new song,
 And his brother said, " Splendid ! "

Then Grisha tried vainly
 To sleep : but half dreaming
 New songs he composed.
 They grew brighter and stronger. . . .

Our peasants would soon
 Have been home from their travels
 If they could have known
 What was happening to Grisha : 450
 With what exaltation
 His bosom was burning ;
 What beautiful strains

RUSSIA

389

In his ears began chiming ;
How blissfully sang he
The wonderful anthem
Which tells of the freedom
And peace of the people.

THE END

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